

**Body politics: - an illumination of the landscape of sexuality and
nationhood? Re-seeing Zimbabwe through elderly women's
representations of their sexual and gendered lives**

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Abstract

This thesis is located at the intersections of theory on gender, sexuality and political change intrinsic to understanding nation-building projects. The theory has been explored by both international scholars (Foucault, 1978; Yuval-Davis, and Anthias, 1989; McClintock, 1995; Alexander, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Stoler, 2002) and African-based researchers (Posel, 2011; Lewis, 2008; Bakare-Yusuf, 2011; Tamale, and Bennett, 2011). Drawing on ideas about the value of marginalised experience in feminist research (Naples, 2003:20), I set my epistemological and methodological gaze on elderly women's experiences of gender and sexuality lived within lives which span colonial and post-colonial time in Zimbabwe. I theorise that at the centre of elderly women's lived realities lie complex questions about nationhood. Their representations of their embodied experiences of gender and sexuality create discursive lenses for re-imagining Zimbabwe's history. Born as early as 1910 (approximately), the nineteen elderly women, whose experiences I listened to come from a constituency largely invisible to gender and sexuality debates. My fieldwork was informed by the hunch that elderly women, who have lived under colonial administration through the war of liberation into the independence era and the subsequent socio-political realities, have dense experiences through which to imagine a 'different' Zimbabwe. Open-ended interviewing allowed the elderly women to tack back and forward across the barrier of time as they shared their life stories in depth. The dominant ideas flowing from their representations are analysed in chapters titled: 'Growing up as a girl', 'Political Shifts' and 'Passage of time'. Contained in these analytic chapters are diverse rehearsals of interviewees' lived experiences through which they profile the gendered fights for identity within 'Zimbabwe' fought since girlhood. The analysis argues that the periodization of Zimbabwean history into 'colonial', 'liberation war' and 'democracy' works to illuminate a long story about the gendered connections to nation-building. The major finding of this thesis is that while it is possible for one to hear the meaning of nationhood through listening to elderly women's gendered experiences, these discourses are replete with tensions and contradictions which make for rich and ambivalent commentary about what 'being Zimbabwean' means. My conclusion is, in part, that elderly women's talk, which creates gender and sexual discourses, deconstructs the hegemonic notions of nationhood. Their talk reveals nationhood as an intricate and confusing process, as opposed to an institutionalisation of 'liberty'. 'Being Zimbabwean now' is about complex negotiations with 'then', interactions which mark, grieve and rehearse the passage of time.

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I give all glory to God who gave me strength to finish and win this race!

Dedication

This is dedicated to my late father, Mr G. Batisai Mugumo, with love.

Twenty years after you left us baba, today, I am a proud daughter who has achieved that which you treasured and aspired the most, for me and the rest of your children. Thank you for believing in me as early as elementary school. Your love, trust and support have sustained me and gave me the courage to begin and complete this journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

At the outset of this research, the idea of researching sexuality among the Shona of Zimbabwe felt potentially traumatising and I was apprehensive. These anxieties are the influences of my own positionalities and subjective experiences. Sexuality ‘talk’ has never been commonplace to me since girlhood because of the absence of paternal aunts who, in my Shona culture, are expected to take their nieces through various stages of puberty. My maternal aunts and/or mother, who were supposed to assume that role, seldom discussed basic sexuality issues with me. Growing up in the midst of these silences, I only became alert to sexuality discourses in boarding school, and then only through the confusion of adolescent ‘biology’. Becoming a ‘woman’ in this new space meant engaging in ‘small talk’ with other adolescent girls about their diverse experiences at puberty or getting involved in sexuality-oriented programmes organised by private companies. After boarding school, my quest to know more about a ‘gendered and sexualised self’, at least from a socio-cultural perspective, stretched into a Masters’ Degree¹, where I took questions of HIV/AIDS and sexuality centrally into my theoretical framework. Woven together, these subjective experiences form the very foundations for exploring the intersections of gender, sexuality and political change in Zimbabwe at PhD level.

My fears of studying sexuality resurfaced as I took my first steps into the PhD journey. I proposed to research an understudied topic among a group of people (elderly women) often excluded from sexuality studies. In addition, open discussion about sexual issues among the Shona is often perceived as taboo and evidence of lack of virtue (depending on the context and the relationship between the people constituting that discussion). After considerable reading, I realised that (in view of my fears) I was and I am not alone. Scholarly literature reveals that “even in its early days, sex-related research made one morally suspect” (Plummer, 1975:4). However, the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa opened up certain spaces for probing into what have traditionally been depicted as the most private aspects of human life (McFadden, 1992:158). Despite these developments, “only a few feminists have dared to write on sexuality”, exploring the silences within families and among friends, and the “taboos, disgust, shame and fear” associated with the subject in Zimbabwe (Masenda-Nzira,

¹ The use of herbal remedies by People Living With HIV and AIDS: A case study of THE CENTRE, Harare. A Dissertation submitted to the Sociology Department in partial fulfilment of the Master of Science Degree in Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of Zimbabwe, 2004 (unpublished).

2003:2-3). It is against this backdrop that the late 20th century publication by Zinanga (1996) underscores the need to demystify “the myth of privatized sexuality in Zimbabwe” (Masenda-Nzira, 2003:3). Feminist research on sexuality in Zimbabwe within the first decade of the 21st century included the work of Gaidzanwa (2001); Hungwe (2006); Kambarami (2006); Mupotsa, and Mhishi, (2008); and very recently by Wekwete, and Manyeruke, (2012). Shaken by the knowledge gaps within the realm of sexuality in Zimbabwe, and invoked by academic calls made by earlier African-based feminist scholars (Kambarami 2006; Zinanga, 1996), I decided to explore the ‘tabooed’ subject, but to do so within the context of theorising the ‘Zimbabwe’ in which the project of nationhood through which I was educated is integral to the production of these gaps.

The parameters of sexuality and gender

When engaging in research located within Gender studies, defining presumably ‘elementary’ concepts such as gender and sexuality appears naive. However, the complexity emanating from the innate overlap between these two concepts sets an insightful basis for the much-needed theorisations within the discipline (see Tamale, 2011:11). The simultaneous study of gender and sexuality thus compels researchers to engage seriously with such complex interplay as a route into deeper and intense explorations. Gender as defined by Lorber (1994:3) “encompasses all social relations that separate people into differentiated gendered statutes”; and sexuality in simple terms is about “those aspects of gender identity that relate to sex” (Jackson, 2002:88). Equally insightful to this thesis is how scholars explore the complexities stemming from the ‘gender’ portion of the phrase ‘being gendered’. Bennett unpacks the concept of gender and reveals that the categorisation of sexed bodies as either male or female through gender markers, and the subsequent reinforcement of such identities through secondary socialisation, is an inherently violent process (Bennett, 2011:96; Butler, 2004). As individuals become gendered, they are expected to fulfil supposedly discrete or mutually exclusive roles within private and public spaces. These seemingly immutable gendered identity boundaries are at the same time “reinforced by custom [and] law” (Meena, 1992:1) as the state, for instance, regulates sexuality (see Phillips, 2011:285 cited in Tamale, 2011:2). Gender becomes that highly structured and hierarchical part of everyday social practices, and the disparities that men and women experience virtually in every sphere of life (including lack of access to land, education and employment opportunities) illuminate this

power imbalance (Mathur, and Gupta, 2004:2). As such, an engagement with the gendered aspects of sexuality reveals the “hierarchised relations” (Bennett, 2011:98) and identities stemming from the process of ‘being gendered’ in a nation – a theme that is central to this thesis.

Thesis focus

This thesis explores notions of nationhood and sexuality through representations on the gendered and sexual bodies of women located within changing economic and socio-political landscapes in Zimbabwe. This exploration is linked to feminist theorisation which prompts researchers to take cognisance of the way “socio-political and cultural processes of creating genders and sexuality are expressed through and upon our bodies” (Steyn, and van Zyl, 2009:4). Within this theoretical framework, I raise contextualised questions about how women’s representations of their bodies can create discursive lenses through which the project of Zimbabwean nationhood could be imagined. Guided by Foucault’s (1978; translated in 1990:105) premise that discourses about sexuality are undeniably “historical construct[s]”, this thesis explores the dialogues between ‘being nationalised’ and ‘being gendered and sexual’ in the context of colonial and post-colonial history. The historical approach allows a review of how epoch-making events (colonialism, the war of liberation and flag-independence/flag-democracy²) central to the current nationalist imagination of the Zimbabwean past can be revisioned through a focus on discourses concerning processes of gender and sexuality.

While “over the past few decades [...] there has been a major explosion of historical writings about sex” (Weeks, 2010:13), the dearth of historically based literature about discourses of gender and sexuality is noteworthy. This is especially true of research that involves the elderly in post-colonial Africa. This claim does not in any way undervalue the contribution made by dominant African-focused feminist scholars³ such as Tamale, (2011), Bennett, (2011), Lewis, (2008), Becker, (2004), and Mama, (1996) whose works on sexuality not only draw upon, but also mirror the interplay between colonial and post-colonial realities. Research within a colonial or post-colonial framework is of considerable value to a study that

² The era of decolonisation and nation-building after the war of liberation

³ Drawing on Bennett (2008:5), these are feminists whose theoretical and methodological frameworks are guided by questions around “how to imagine a “field” (in an African context!).”

brings a historical perspective to understanding ‘nationhood’ in Zimbabwe. The historical frame broadens the base from which interrogation of complex enmeshment of sexuality and the macro structures that shape everyday life of post-colonial nations can be explored. I accept the argument that the idea of locating sexuality within a historical setting creates a discursive and critical platform for researchers to engage and “relate sexuality to other phenomena” (Weeks, 2010:18).

As I attempt to disentangle the complexities unravelled by the debates on nationhood, gender, sexuality and socio-political change, I engage with a category of people who have been largely invisible to research. By locating the theorisation of ageing women about their embodied gender and sexuality within a historical framework, I become equipped with a sense of chronological depth for interpreting the impact that macroscopic shifts in society have had on women’s lives, and consequently, how these women have experienced their sexuality. I theorise that elderly women have either experienced or witnessed gendered structural and ideological shifts dating back to the colonial era. I therefore argue that their life stories create discourses of sexuality and nationhood, which are re/constructed over time. Such theorising gives me room to examine how elderly women have challenged or negotiated with complex gendered barriers that have defined their understanding of what it means to ‘be Zimbabwean’.

I do not merely acknowledge the need to engage with the politics of the body from a historical perspective (see Bennett, 2011; Tamale, 2011:30), but I also attend to the effects that post-colonial trajectories of gender and sexuality have had on women’s lives. This post-colonial focus is informed by a claim that the nation-sexuality battle evident in the colonial era continues beyond flag-independence, a period where nationalism and the project of nation-building may introduce ‘new’ discourses which impact on gender and sexuality. The temporal landscape of the thesis moves back and forth from remembered time in the colonial era through flag-independence to contemporary Zimbabwe. As such, ‘time’, which heavily influences the way I structure the thesis, is core to representations of the discursiveness of the production of Zimbabwe as a ‘nation’.

‘Time’ in this thesis is a central construct within the lifecycle which encompasses girlhood, womanhood, wifhood, motherhood, the life of a divorcee or a widow, and also grandmotherly life. Emerging out of the analysis of the elderly women’s lived realities is a

dominant discourse about the passage of time, which like Rabinow's *Marking Time: On the Anthropology of the Contemporary* (2008), illustrates the difference between 'then' and 'now'. The 'then' and 'now' discourse evokes 'time' as the production of newness and also as unfolding (see Grosz, 2000:1018) along with the shifting socio-political landscape of Zimbabwe. 'Now' emerges as "a permanent era of problematisation" (O'Brien, 2008:285; see also Rabinow, 2008), an era of questioning and tension around the project of the future. Consequently, there are instances in this thesis where 'time' seems to freeze – testimony such as "we have little hope now; the nation has no ideas; we are stuck; time is stuck; Zimbabwe is stuck." The passage of time is also discussed as a form of immanent re-emergence, and here 'time' serves as inspiration for modernities ahead. The image becomes that of 'time' as a major factor illuminating Zimbabwean women's shifting experiences of nationhood as well as how the women are engaging or are being engaged by the state.

Overall, I see the findings of this study as contributing to deepened intellectual grasp of the ways in which conventional histories of the nation need deconstruction through the illumination of changing discourses of gender and sexuality. Profiling Zimbabwe through the diverse ways in which that change has been experienced by elderly women is central to this thesis.

Thesis outline

The literature review has been divided into two chapters, which first provide the theoretical and then the contextual bases for this research. My location in Africa does not limit the scope of the study to scholarly contributions from Africa. Chapter 2 explores theoretical literature on the politics of gender and sexuality as analysed by dominant international theorists⁴. It also examines the contribution of African-based researchers who have taken the discourses of these international scholars further, and debated the entangled networks of sexualities and gendered nationhood on the continent. While acknowledging that African scholars have taken international debates further, I also argue that they have developed new contexts for discussions of sexuality that are not necessarily dependent on existing international discourse. As the chapter progresses, the focus shifts to scholars whose analytic gaze is set on colonial

⁴ The binary – African-based feminist researchers/international theorists – serves to illuminate how continental feminist scholarship interacts with, deconstructs or agrees with northern theory.

and post-colonial African states. After locating the discussion within a colonial/post-colonial context, the thesis is ready to engage in a contextualised analysis of how the nation/sexuality battle has been theorised within a specific nation. The global and continental scholarship and the contextual chapter show the discursive and political nature of identity construction in colonial and post-colonial settings, in a way that sets a theoretical and analytic frame for engaging with the elderly women's discourses throughout this thesis. Chapter 3, which is the second literature review chapter, profiles the production of Zimbabwe as a 'nation'. The chapter reviews the material on colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe by examining how history-making events have shaped the politics of sexuality in the 'new' democracy. The chapter draws on scholarship that tracks constructions of women as sexual and gendered 'citizens' across different historical eras while at the same time unravelling the connections between earlier and current theorisations and debates on the subject. Thus, the chapter pays considerable attention to ideas about women, gender and sexuality in Zimbabwe as they have been explored and debated by earlier scholars through different research themes. In Chapter 3, one can clearly discern how theoretical and contextual-based literature is core to the methodological standpoints adopted in this thesis, and to the formulation of the principal research questions:

- ❖ What effects did the transition from colonial Rhodesia to present-day Zimbabwe have on elderly women and their sexuality? How do elderly women represent issues of gender and sexuality within this transition?
- ❖ To what extent can discourses of gender and sexuality for elderly women who have been located within shifting socio-political and economic landscapes, interrogate who and what Zimbabwe 'is'? How has 'being Zimbabwean' been imagined through discourses on women's bodies and experiences of sexuality?
- ❖ What happens to one's understanding of the project of nationhood in Zimbabwe when one takes seriously discourses of gender and sexuality that emerge from listening to elderly women's life stories?

Chapter 4 discusses the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of this research. To unpack these two key concepts, I embrace Harding's (1987) definition of epistemology as a "theory of knowledge" and of methodology as "a theory and analysis of how research does

or should proceed” (see Naples, 2003:3). The methodological and epistemological processes encompass aspects of my Zimbabwean identity, principally as a ‘young’ Shona woman. These subjective positionalities have been pivotal at every stage of this research, from proposal development to thesis write-up. The inspiration to incorporate my positionality into the methodological frame flows from the viewpoint that “researchers have become increasingly self-conscious about their location in their research process within which they produce knowledge” (Mbilinyi 1992:35). Thus the chapter captures the influence of my subjective positionality throughout the research journey, and my experiences as a researcher who has worked with ‘talk’ as a way of creating qualitative data. The concluding section of Chapter 4 discusses how I developed an analytic framework suitable for a researcher working with ‘talk’ as a way of generating knowledge(s) through listening to elderly women’s ‘voices’.

The four chapters that precede data analysis lay a solid foundation for thematically engaging the transcripts narratives in order to identify the tensions and contradictions in the ways these elderly women’s bodies have been constructed and represented since girlhood. Data analysis follows a chronological order: Chapter 5 is about ‘girlhood’, Chapter 6 presents the ‘political shifts’ that women experienced during Chimurenga War and in the three decades that followed Zimbabwe’s independence, and Chapter 7 engages with ‘now’. These three analytic chapters begin by working with the verbatim transcripts of the narratives, but do not yet draw upon scholarly literature. I developed this approach in order to avoid the silencing effect literature could have on women’s voices. This standpoint is informed by the perception that excessive referencing or reviewing of literature in the analytic chapters could reduce the life stories to a mere summary. As such, data analysis begins by identifying and discussing the dominant discourses and sub-themes that emerge from the interviewees’ transcripts narratives rather than from an examination of the discourses and dimensions that appear in the scholarly literature. The analytic framework is heavily influenced by the perception of “literature as further data to be fed into the analysis, but at the stage in the data analysis when theoretical directions have become clear” (Punch, 2005:159). Consequently, though reference to the relevant scholars is made in the concluding sections of the three analytic chapters, it is only in Chapter 8 that I critically engage the body of literature.

Chapter 8 is devoted to discussion. It revisits the theoretical and contextual frameworks setup in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 2 and proceeds to explain how the data presented in the three

analytic chapters corresponds with the scholarly literature. In other words, Chapter 8 goes back to the dominant analytic themes: ('Growing up as a girl', 'Political shifts' and 'Passage of time'), and discusses them in the light of what scholars have theorised about sexuality and nationhood. The chapter problematises the central theorisation that the analysis of women's bodies and sexualities offers insights relevant to the unpacking of the nation/sexuality battle. The chapter reviews the extent to which one could remap or re-imagine the project of nationhood in Zimbabwe through representations of women's bodies and their diverse experiences of gender and sexuality.

Chapter 9 – the concluding chapter – synergises the whole thesis by tracing how the research journey has unfolded from proposal stage to data presentation and analysis. In conclusion, the chapter restates the dominant conceptual and theoretical insights that I have gained in the course of my research, points out the limitations of this study, and evaluates the contribution that the thesis has made to the study of gender, sexuality and nationhood.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Literature Review

This chapter surveys the literature which deals with questions of gender, sexuality and nationality/nation-building, and offers a theoretical framework for my research. I espouse the concept of 'nation' as a central theoretical tool, not in its capacity as a policy formulating unit (Ranchod-Nilsson, and Tétreault, 2000:11) but as a dynamic entity that reacts to ideological, socio-political and economic realities (Gaitskell, and Unterhalter, 1989:58). Here nation is constructed as a gendered, political and sexualised space (Posel, 2011; Stoler, 2002) where citizens battle for meanings of living in such a space. At the core to of this chapter are the ideas about the gendered discourse of nationalism (McClintock, 1995:355; 1991) through which a number of scholars have theorised about the link between nation, bodies and sexualities (Posel, 2011:139). I situate this chapter within a Foucauldian framework, specifically his theory about bio-politics. Bio-politics according to Foucault (1978, translated in 1990) are ideas deeply entrenched in discourses of bio-power that explore the meaning of surveillance and the ways in which the state manages the body. Foucault's theory exposes how nations are constructed and reshaped as the state patrols and subjugates the body (Foucault, 1978; translated in 1990:140; see Yuval-Davis, and Anthias, 1989:5) and it is within zones of power relations that the body acquires meaning (Butler, 1990:125). The chapter works with the idea that discourses around sexuality, gender and womanhood constitute a way of imagining connections between the state and the popular. Foucault (1978; translated in 1990) formulates this argument in different ways through his notions of the production of knowledge(s) and discourses, the notions of surveillance, and of how one perceives sexuality. Foucault's framework creates a profound theoretical foundation for reading 'nation/nationhood' through the various discourses of women's bodies and sexuality in colonial and post-colonial contexts.

In order to set up a framework with which to look at the reasons why discourses of gender and sexuality help one to understand the political shape of a nation, specifically Zimbabwe, it is necessary to explore both international and African theoretical literature. The chapter takes a broad approach that allows engagement with very complex intellectual history on the links between nationhood and the politics of gender and sexuality. This theory of nation as involving the dynamics of gender and sexuality has been explored by Foucault, Butler, Yuval-Davis, McClintock, Stoler and Alexander, and many others. Ensuing from these

dominant voices is a range of international scholarship that explores questions of gender and sexuality in relation to the meaning of the nation. What the international theory suggests is that one cannot understand nationhood without taking the question of gender and sexuality seriously. The theoretical literature takes the change from colonial to post-colonial as a central transition through which to research the emergence of the nation and the politics of gender and sexuality. Gender and sexuality are continually trivialised in mainstream discourses on ‘nation/nationalism’ (Ranchod-Nilsson, and Tétreault, 2000:i; Yuval-Davis, 1997:2) so much so that gender and sexuality matters rarely inform historical profiles of a specific nation (Pape, 1990:700). Therefore the chapter draws on the connection between gender-sexuality-colonialism, which has often been disregarded “as a fait accompli of nature” (McClintock, 1995:6).

The chapter is predominantly a review of the literature on the politics of gender and sexuality, and more especially the theoretical debates of the past forty years around the nation-sexuality battle in Africa. Although I draw on McClintock’s *Imperial Leather* that is explicitly critical of colonial attempt to form states, closer attention is paid to the work of Stoler, Pape, Phillips and others, who explore the operation of nation-building and sexuality in specific colonies. These scholars claim that at the core of European colonialisms, British colonialism in particular, were ideas about sexuality and gender. Such a theoretical lens leads the chapter into a whole new terrain in which thinking about gender and sexuality is a way of deepening feminist analysis in post-colonial African nations. The chapter then shifts to a range of contemporary scholarship on nationalism in post-colonial states which calls for critical mapping due to its vastness. A considerable number of African-focused post-colonial feminists, but principally Lewis, Posel, Tamale, Bennett, McFadden and Bakare-Yusuf, engage in debates raised through different ‘zones’ of theorising often linked with questions of nationalism/nation-building. What connects these post-colonial feminists to the dominant theorists (Foucault, McClintock and Yuval-Davis) and critical colonial scholars (Stoler, Pape and Phillips) is the claim that to see nationhood in formation and in contestation is to see the operation of gender and sexuality. Emerging out of this chapter is a powerful nation/sexuality battle central to this thesis, which seeks to analyse representations of elderly women’s gendered and sexual lives in ways that deepen the understanding of ‘Zimbabwe as a nation’. Therefore the literature chosen for this chapter sets a theoretical framework for engaging with contextual notions of ‘Zimbabwe as a nation’ in Chapter 3, and in the analytic chapters of this thesis as well.

Theorisations with the nation-sexuality battle

The theorisation that frames nations and nationalism as gendered (McClintock, 1995; 1993&1991) is central to this research. This framework has been proposed in book-length analyses such as *Women, States, and Nationalism*, (Ranchod-Nilsson, and Tétreault, 2000); *Gender and Nation* (Yuval-Davis, 1997); and *Women-Nation-State* (Yuval-Davis, and Anthias, 1989). The construction of nationalism as a gendered discourse makes it problematic to unpack this phenomenon independent of a theory of the politics of gender (McClintock, 1995:355). Theories of gender involve the idea that the construction of a nation is “the bordered differentiation” of bodies (Eisenstein, 2000:43). Foucault (1978; translated in 1990:94) analyses the notion of power and how it operates in conjunction with sexual relations. Flowing from Foucault’s analysis is a discourse which recognises that power relations emerge as a result of imbalances inherent in those interactions (see also Jeater, 1993:17-9).

Conventionally, nations have been known for endorsing the construction, institutionalisation and persistence of divisions that follow gender fault lines (McClintock, 1995:353). A nation emerges as a historically entrenched structure that approves of gendered access to resources within its boundaries (McClintock, 1993:61; McClintock, 1995:353). It is for this reason that “gender differences are naturalised as codes” which inform nation-building processes (Ranchod-Nilsson, and Tétreault, 2000:11). Since nations are historical constructs (Yuval-Davis, 1997:4), an insight into how nations shift culturally and politically is integral to the study of gender and sexuality discourses (Kim-Puri, 2005:137).

The fact that state projects can be opposed reduces the nation to a space where gendered nationhood battles are fought such that nationalist power struggles, which emerge as diverse groups wrestle for domination, contribute to the formation of nations (Yuval-Davis, 1997:4). Yuval-Davis’s observations echo the Foucauldian notion of power that intimately ties power to resistance and reduces nation-states to “the terminal forms power takes” (Foucault, 1978; translated in 1990:92) or to “a locus of power” (Stoler, 1995:28; Butler and Spivak, 2010:1). These observations explain why Foucault’s (1978; translated in 1990) analysis of power places emphasis on the power relations and the notion of resistance rather than on its repressive function. An example of such resistance would be the way citizens engage in

identity battles often through gendered and violent ways (McClintock, 1993:61), hence the claim that “all nationalisms are [...] dangerous” (McClintock, 1995:352). The discourse of nationalism frames the notion of “sexualised violence” as one of the conflicting ways in which women epitomize the various gendered nationhood battles (Ranchod-Nilsson, and Tétreault, 2000:i). Many feminist scholars, Kim-Puri, (2005), Butler, (2004) and Lewis, (2008:105) included, have explored this dimension of nationhood.

Much feminist scholarship has an intense interest in the historical processes of nation-building (Kim-Puri, 2005:144). A list of feminist scholars who theorise about the intimate liaison between gender, race and sexualised colonial nationhood projects can be drawn up from the work of Magubane (2001:816) and of Kim-Puri (2005:138). It includes major theorists such as Abrahams (1997), Alexander and Mohanty (1997), Jayawardena (1986), Kandiyoti (1991), Mayer (2000), McClintock, (1995), Moghadam (1996), Puri (1999&2004), Stoler, (1995&1997), and Yuval-Davis (1997). These scholars explore the historical dimensions of nation-building in the colonial and post-colonial periods.

Nation-building in colonial Africa

The scholarship reviewed in this section explores the theories of nation-building processes in colonial contexts. In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, Williams and Chrisman (1994:193) deploy a “psychosexual focus” to critically interrogate how colonising projects were guided by sexual discourses. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* by Stoler (2002) problematises the ways in which sexual relations served as effective tools for differentiating colonial powers from the colonised by setting up and regulating boundaries of sexual interaction. A closer examination of these differentiated sexual relations in *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* exposes concealed patterns in gendered racial categorisation (Stoler, 1995:8). *Sexual affronts and racial frontiers* points to the dynamics of race, sexuality and gender that dominated nation-building processes in the French and Dutch colonies (Stoler, 1997). These are contexts where ‘the intimate’ was subjected to constant surveillance in the name of racial purity (Stoler, 2002:17).

Contextualised critiques of colonial states

The scope of this analysis encompasses articles that expose and critique the way European imperialists established, organised and governed specific African colonies. Stoler writes about the way desire was conceptualised in Malawi; and McCulloch, Phillips and Pape grapple with the ‘perils of sex’ in Southern Rhodesia. Phillips explores the role of the ‘black peril’ in the construction of a colonial Rhodesian nation. The term ‘black peril’ was used across the continent to denote “the professed dangers of sexual assault on white women by black men” (Stoler, 2002:58). Earlier scholarship on sex perils (McCulloch, 2000; Pape, 1990) shows how the fear of sexual interaction between black men and white women engulfed spaces racially dominated by white people in Johannesburg, Bulawayo and Harare during the first quarter of the 20th century (Phillips, 2011:101). The ‘black and white sex perils’ functioned as a pivotal tool for reinforcing racial and gender inequalities, and the ultimate goal was to establish a nation governed by a racially ‘superior’ male, who invariably was white (Pape, 1990:669; Samasuwo, 1994:3). The ‘sex perils’ saw the enactment of restrictive legislation as the means of reinforcing relational separation from a socio-sexual perspective and to maintain racial stratification in the colony (Phillips, 2011:101).

The pressure to preserve ‘white’ as the ‘superior’ race (Pape, 1990:700) existed in an extreme form in South Africa where racial stratification was entrenched in a legal structure that favoured the colonial power (Motsei, 2007:26). Abrahams (1997) points at the legal inequalities that placed more value on bodies that were racially categorised as white than on black ones, an example is the waiving of the death penalty when a white man raped an African woman (Motsei, 2007:27). Similarly, the codification of ‘the black peril’ in colonial New Guinea under “the White Women’s Protection Ordinance of 1926” stipulated that anyone found guilty of the “rape or attempted rape upon a European woman or girl” would be exterminated (Inglis, 1975 cited in Stoler, 2002:58). It is evident that the colonial state depended upon racialised sexual hierarchies and gendered sexual mores imposed on subjugated territories and bodies. In the 20th century in Bombay, India, European sex workers were under constant surveillance in order to avert interracial intimacy (Tambe, 2005:162). Given that the domination of gendered bodies by the state is often accomplished through the use of machinery at its disposal (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989:5), the patrol in colonial India strengthened the repressive muscle of law enforcement agents (see Kim-Puri, 2005:144). The construction and enforcement of restrictive legislation for the surveillance of

the body and to subjugate the colonised hints at how fluid set borders are subject to “what is being managed or negotiated” (Yuval-Davis, and Anthias, 1989:5).

The phrase “double colonization” which was coined by Holst-Peterson and Rutherford portrays the way women were subjected to the hegemonic power of both colonised and imperial men (see Young, 1995:162; McClintock, 1995:6; Phillips, 2011:113). This hierarchical power structure often relegated women to gendered and sexualised positions which had very restricted access to opportunities (see Jeater, 1993:19). European imperialists capitalised on pre-existing gendered power structures to reinforce interactional and labour systems in which women served “as mothers, prostitutes and concubines” (McClintock, 1995:6) among other gendered roles outlined in Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989:7). An example of these gendered roles is the way “white women were exhorted to bear babies for Botha” in apartheid South Africa (Peterson, 2000:64 citing McClintock, 1991). In order to fulfil their patriotic duty of giving birth to future inhabitants (Yuval-Davis, 2006:209; Yuval-Davis, 1997), South African white women had to embrace their procreative role to ensure the future of the white nation.

The anthology *Women-Nation-State* by Yuval-Davis and Anthias, (1989) contains a similar example of how women were expected to bear children as a duty in Britain in the 1980s (Klug 1989:31). The book also introduces the work of de Lepervanche, (1989) on the way women fulfilled their gendered role as “breeders of the nation” in Australia (see Yuval-Davis, 1989:12). It is clearly evident that women’s experience of nation-building is gendered (McClintock, 1993:67) and that their connection to the nation as in apartheid South Africa was negotiated through liaisons with men (McClintock, 1991:112).

The narrative of colonial Southern Africa chronicles the diverse ways in which the politics of the body shaped and entrenched what ‘the white-male-ruling class’ valued (Pape, 1990:700). For instance, the creation of identities along sexual and gender fault lines in the Gwelo District of colonial Zimbabwe in the last decade of the 19th century served to uphold “the material interests” of the imperial power (Jeater, 1993:18). Underlying these colonial relations is a deep narrative that illuminates how the imperialists used the eroticised body as an apparatus for legitimising their hegemonic status “as agents of power and knowledge” (McClintock, 1995:24) within the imperial space. Imperial powers used the language of civilisation (see Tamale 2011:14), along with the image of a white man as ‘the knower’ to

legitimise European imperialism and to sanction incidents of rape in Namibia, Congo, South Africa, Mozambique and Somalia among many other colonies (Motsei, 2007:26). Williams and Chrisman (1994:193) point at an “ideological focus” deployed to suggest that the “instrumentalised” image of a white woman epitomized “Western civilisation” in the literature on the colonising project. The story of Sarah Baartmann from the Cape Colony, South Africa, which is profiled in *Black Bodies, White Bodies* (Gilman, 1985) exposes how European imperialists constructed and represented Africans as racially and sexually different from them (Magubane, 2001:816-7). This practice has supported the claim that essentialist images of African bodies and their sexualities formed an integral component of colonial powers’ mission to annex and control the ‘native’ man and his territory (Tamale 2011:15).

The nation-sexuality debate in post-colonial states

An exploration of the literature on post-flag democracy requires one to tackle the complex colonial legacy (Can, 2006:36; McClintock, 1995) in order to point out the perceived “continuities between the colonial and the post-colonial” (Mishra, and Hodge, 1994:288; see Becker, 2004:36). The argument for such continuity is based on the insight that post-coloniality also draws upon questions of gender and sexuality (Alexander, 1994:5). Scholars writing from a post-colonial perspective suggest that what happened in colonial states is still happening in post-flag democracies as the new powers engage in the project of building a new nation. What differentiates the colonial critique (discussed under the previous sub-theme) from scholarship on post-colonial states is that the former reads the practices of colonial administrations and pays particular attention to the ways in which the colonial gaze worked with issues of gender and sexuality. The colonial critique has very little to say about what was happening in specific contexts for people who might have been impacted by colonial processes. The literature on post-coloniality on the other hand represents ‘rights-based fights’ that emerge within specific post-colonial zones as citizens negotiate their place in the so-called new nation.

The study of the post-colonial African state/nation in terms of gender and sexualities has been explored through a myriad of thematic areas often dominated by the ideas about democracy and ‘the body’, questions of health and education, and engagement with public culture. The scholarship on post-flag democracy is marked by overlapping debates around rights,

citizenship, security, the false culture/tradition divide, laws and legal battles, policy discourses, and the politics of heteronormativity. These entangled discourses constitute 'zones' where nationhood is fought over – fights in which sexuality and gender are often the very ground of contestations over who women are or should be. Although some scholars think about the nation's main 'fights' as being around issues of land and borders for instance, this thesis is interested in fights that have to do with sexuality and gender projects. Emerging out of these fights is a theory of women as bodies through which the 'fight for ownership of nation' is engaged. "Women's bodies and life circumstances" function as platforms where battles over interpretations of the idea of 'nation' are played out (Ranchod-Nilsson, and Tétreault, 2000:1). For this reason, the discourses of nationhood are located and discussed on the basis of themes that are usually viewed as 'fights' throughout the section on post-coloniality. The following sub-themes about the 'fight for ownership of nation' are pivotal to our understanding of the political nature of identity construction in post-colonial settings. This is a theme that is central to Chapter 3 where I engage with contextual literature (profiled by Zimbabwean scholars) on women's experiences of being 'nationalised' during the production of Zimbabwe. The analysis of these 'fights' also prepares the thesis to engage with empirical data emerging from the elderly women's realities of living through a gendered body in Zimbabwe presented in the analytic chapters of this thesis.

A fight about rights

Most of the 'international rights' that are debated in relation to notions of sexuality as queer may not be useful in the case of this research, but from these debates there may emerge "new conceptual and methodological approaches to sexuality" (Parker, 2011:60). Of interest to me is the notion of national in the phrase 'international human rights' largely because rights discourses flow from the debate between the international and the national and the latter becomes a site for the contestations of rights in relation to nationhood. Citizens of post-colonial contexts often find themselves engaging in 'gendered fights' over ideological, politics and structural realities of those nations. The dominant feminist scholars (including Tamale, Gaidzanwa, Bennett, and Bakare-Yusuf) have conceptualised and engaged the rights discourse in post-colonial Africa. Bennett for instance reveals that,

The need to combat the transmission of HIV, to curtail sexual violence and to ensure that women and girls have access to education, healthcare, and political rights as

basic conditions of democracy has increasingly placed issues of sexuality at the forefront of theoretical and activist engagements with the state across Africa (Bennett, 2011:78).

The central theory questions the way the notion of nationhood in the post-colonial state is exposed to new revelations of power and difference as citizens continuously engage in ‘fights about rights’. Further theoretical reflection suggests that ‘the fight about rights’ is at the centre of all other nationhood fights, and this interplay becomes clearly visible as the chapter unfolds. The ‘fight about rights’ therefore sets up a framework through which African-focused scholars theorise about the rights discourse in relation to other zones of fights about nationhood – fights that citizens engage as they negotiate issues of citizenship, security or gender-based violence, the false culture/tradition divide, post-colonial policies and laws, and the politics of heteronormativity. The central insight here is that the broader rights discourses which emerge in the policy sphere are being discussed from a feminist standpoint that is interested in reforming the shape of the state so as to achieve gender equality.

A fight about citizenship

Debates that I engage here are elicited from scholarship that poses theoretical questions on citizenship, gender and nationhood. The definition of citizenship points to “a reciprocal relationship of rights and responsibilities between individuals and the state” (Yuval-Davis, 2006:205; see also Oldfield, Salo and Schlyter, 2009). McClintock (1994:298) on the other hand dismisses outright the possibility of non-gendered access to these rights in a post-colonial nation. The conjunction of gender, sexuality and the nation shows that the nature of the “constructions of nationhood via rights and duties of citizenship are gendered” (Yuval-Davis, 1997:4). Drawing on post-colonial Uganda, Obbo (1989) asserts that when women’s core duty in nation-building projects is reduced to being a mother, women are seen as demonstrating their allegiance to the nation by bearing children. The procreative function is the very foundation of gendered access to the labour market for women (see Anthias, and Yuval-Davis, 1989:13) in post-colonial states.

The way post-colonial states incessantly police women’s bodies reveals the link between rights, citizenship and gender. Women in many post-colonial African states usually negotiate the meaning of citizenship in the face of conservative policies on contraception, abortion and

marriage. Such gendered structures have resulted in a fight between “pro-life” and “pro-choice” activists in Zimbabwe (Tichagwa, 1998:63), but this battle is not unique to Zimbabwe. Similar tensions have emerged in other nations where pro-natalists critique progressive frameworks that sanction abortion (Bennett, 2011:78) in ways that undermine women’s rights to services. Negative perceptions of infertility and contraceptives in post-colonial Uganda also indicate the gendered policing of citizens’ bodies and sexualities (Obbo, 1989:79). Vickers’ (1990:485) “battle of the cradle” exposes how the state controls women’s bodies from the circumstances under which women reproduce to the number of children and rights over those children (see Peterson, 2000:64). Questions dictating the “when and how” of procreation (Ranchod-Nilsson, and Tétreault, 2000:5) or state frameworks policing “with whom” one could engage sexually (Tamale, 2011:3) strip women of their reproductive and sexual rights.

National boundaries are set in ways that exclude and include certain individuals through a process that marks and distinguishes insiders from outsiders (Yuval-Davis, 2006:204). Conceptualisations of citizenship illuminate how excluded groups fight gendered and racialised discrimination which determine the rights they can enjoy within the boundaries of a nation (Berlant, 2000 cited in Swartz, Hamilton Harding and DeLannoy, 2012:29). The way South African identity was conceptualised post-1994 has worked to exclude racial minorities such as Indian South Africans, a population whose experience of discrimination reveals how contested the politics of identity have been, and how these politics have translated into unequal access to resources in this new ‘democracy’ (Radhakrishnan, 2005:262). The ‘fight about citizenship’ within post-colonial nations is revealed in statements like “I am a national but not a citizen” (Alexander, 1994:5). The battle is about being recognised as a full citizen who enjoys all rights one is entitled to within the boundaries of a post-colonial nation. In many post-colonial African countries, the ‘fight about citizenship’ is often fought by the minorities who are marginalised by the politics of heteronormativity and gender identity, another dimension in the discussion on post-coloniality and sexuality.

A fight about security

McClintock (1994:298) theorises that the operations of flag-democracies “institutionalise gender power.” In the process of building post-colonial nations, the institution of marriage (McClintock, 1991:112) for example locates women in a hierarchal power structure which

often undermines their security. As the state contains sexuality by means of conservative and patriarchal policies which regulate marriage, contraception, abortion, sexual orientation or gender identity, women find themselves constantly having to navigate violent ideological and physical barriers to sexual liberty. Conservative state frameworks form the basis of gender-based violence which has drastic consequences for women's sexual rights (see Njovana, and Watts, 1996). Thus the 'fight about security' is about gender-based violence and the hegemonic use of state power in post-colonial Africa.

Studies that take questions of sexuality, gender and nationhood in Africa seriously cannot ignore the discourse around gender-based violence. Gender-based violence both as practice and a discursive matter has led to large-scale continental feminist activism and intellectual debate on the violation of women's rights, and their struggle for gender equality in post-flag democracies (Bennett, 2011:94; Green, 1999). The literature contains the writings of a number of African-focused scholars (Njovana, and Watts, 1996; Lahiri, 2011; Bennett, 2010; Ayiera, 2010; Motsei, 2007; Omarjee, 2008; Lewis, 2008 and Turshen, 2001) who have shown how the fight for security connects gender and sexuality to nationhood and the state in post-colonial Africa.

Bennett's chapter on '*Subversion and Resistance: activist initiatives*' frames continental activism as a way of interpreting "what it means to tackle patriarchies and social and economic injustice" (Bennett, 2011:94). The socio-economic inequalities created by a patriarchal state contribute towards gender-based violence especially when economically vulnerable women who are violated are forced to maintain a culture of silence in order to protect their marriages and to ensure that their basic needs are met (Njovana, and Watts, 1996:46). An analysis of these socio-economic barriers in the face of the high levels of poverty across the continent suggests that "poverty creates an environment of vulnerability for women" (Bennett, 2011:95). Due to the material realities of living in post-colonial Africa, many poor women are trapped in a situation where they find it hard to break away from the cycle of violence than women in more affluent circumstances, and the politics of survival often overrides the struggle for security (ibid:95; Njovana, and Watts, 1996:46).

The 'fight about security' reveals that although the state has the responsibility for ensuring that survivors of gender-based violence have access to legal, medical and psycho-social support services, in reality, the state contributes to the perpetual abuse of gendered citizens.

This situation is characteristic of post-colonial spaces where nationalist political projects take precedence over the rights of citizens. The Government of Zimbabwe, for example, has repeatedly launched physically and psychologically violent ‘clean-up’ campaigns, case in point is the infamous ‘*Operation Murambatsvina*’ of 2005 (see Tibaijuka, 2005), as part of its controversial nation-building project. The nation becomes a site where the state uses repressive apparatus such as the police, even the army in the absence of any war, to patrol its citizens in gendered ways. The ‘fight about security’ in post-colonial settings like Zimbabwe engages with the “daily realities of brutality and state indifference” (Bennett, 2011:94). The volatile political milieu provides the state with grounds for promoting and endorsing gender-based violence. A case in point is police harassment and brutality towards women who occupy street corners from where they engage in sex work as part of their gendered battle to survive. The narratives of rape from war ravaged countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, (Ayiera, 2010); Liberia, northern Uganda and Sudan (Bennett, 2010); and Rwanda (Twagiramariya, and Turshen, 1998; Omarjee, 2008) are evidence of persistent violations of women’s bodily integrity and sexual rights.

Approximately a year on the road to democracy, McClintock (1995:386) predicted that issues of gender and sexuality would serve as a discursive weapon for reconfiguring post-apartheid South Africa. While the new democracy has been applauded for its progressive stance on sexual orientation (Mutua, 2011:458), the disconnection between constitutional rights and the lived realities of homosexuals has provided scholars a space for exploring the politics of belonging. Scholars interrogate what it means to live as lesbian in a country where, on one hand, sexual orientation has a human right status, but on the other, lesbians are sexually violated in the name of “corrective rape” (Epprecht, 2010:769; Lewis, 2008:107). The politics of “corrective rape” along with other forms of gender-based violence in post-apartheid South Africa propagate an image of a crime-ridden democracy in dire need of “more policing and harsher sentencing” – factors which reinforce state hegemony (Lahiri, 2011:123-4). The sexual and gendered body located in a radically shifting political milieu becomes “a site for discursive power struggles” (Steyn, and van Zyl, 2009:4). Thus, the ‘fight about security’ for gendered citizens cannot be examined separately from the idea of the ‘nation’ in post-colonial Africa.

The culture/tradition divide

This section is not a mere rehearsal of essentialist constructions and representations of culture and sexuality in Africa that either reintroduce or reinforce a false culture/tradition dichotomy. Rather, I engage with scholars who appreciate the salience of culture and cultural practices to contemporary questions of gender and sexuality (Bennett, 2011:93; Tamale, 2008; Kolawole, 2004). Of particular relevance is the theorisation that colonial representations of sexuality have permeated nation-building projects in various flag democracies across the continent where they are pivotal to the construction and interpretation of nationalism (Lewis, 2011:210). Ratele's *Native chief and white headmen* (2007) points out how the 'reductive' theorisation of culture is built on the idea that there are aspects of culture that appear to be immutable (Lewis, 2011:210). In support of the mutability of culture, post-colonial African states that are predominantly patriarchal deploy the false "tradition/timeless culture" argument to control the sexuality of citizens (ibid: 210). An example is post-colonial Zimbabwe where the bodies of gendered citizens are patrolled by the state through its insistent drive to preserve that which it considers as "the national heritage" (Seidman, 1984:432). Tamale draws on materials from the Women and Law in Southern Africa project (2000&2001) to substantiate her position that, that which is categorised as culture in post-colonial settings remains a colonial construct of hierarchised power relations (Tamale, 2008:51-2) through which colonisers set sexual parameters for the colonised (Bennett, 2011:81).

Critical scholarship discussing the 'culture/tradition divide' as false is a powerful 'vehicle' that propels sexuality discourses towards an insightful direction. Tamale (2008:47) explains the culture/rights binary as a dangerous theoretical framework in terms of the parameters within which hegemonic notions around women and their rights could be contested. A divergent analysis of the culture/tradition dichotomy is a key theoretical lens that allows scholars to debunk the widespread discernment of culture as forever hostile to the achievement of women's rights in post-colonial Africa. For instance, Kolawole (2004:254) has since shifted her analytic gaze to "progressive manifestations" of culture in Africa. Drawing on those dimensions of 'African culture' that ensure the realisation of women's rights, Tamale (2008:49) constructs a progressive image of the culture/rights binary which simultaneously locates culture as fluid and transmutable. Such fluidity or mutability is based on the idea that culture is constantly re-constructed subject to shifting realities (Lewis, 2011:210). That acknowledgement alone surpasses mere erasure of that which is 'modern' from gender and sexuality debates such that culture, as Tamale (2008) puts forward, is

defined in ways that embrace sexual diversity (see Bennett, 2011:92-3). Clearly, a progressive perception of the culture/tradition divide hints at huge theoretical departures from analytic frameworks that fail to offer a critical scrutiny of how culture could positively transform discourses of women's rights in Africa (Tamale, 2008:65).

Laws and legal battles

This section explores the enmeshment of gender and sexuality with the law, which suggests that sexual relations between and among citizens of post-colonial contexts are deeply embedded in the project of nationhood/nation-building. The depiction of the law in scholarship as “inherently gendered” (Bennett, and Reddy, 2007:54), together with the assertion that gendered fights on the continent are wrestled with through the law (Tamale, and Bennett, 2011:1) renders an in-depth examination of the link between gendered sexuality and legal discourses vital. An analysis of the ways in which the state engages with citizens as sexual and gendered reveals how the law shifts discourses of sexuality into zones of power struggles through which the repressive state apparatus become operational (Tamale, 2011:3). Questions around “what, when and with whom” one could be intimate expose the ways in which many states on the continent strive to regulate sexual relations through punitive measures (ibid: 3). The state supports a legal structure anchored in discourses, which on one hand protect and privilege a heterosexual identity and on the other, reprimand individual citizens for deviating from normative sexuality (see Steyn, and van Zyl, 2009:3). Sexuality, as a result, is held responsible for the reproduction of legal frameworks that differentiate sanctioned relations from illegitimate ones (Phillips, 2011 cited in Tamale, 2011:2).

Several scholars point out the various ways in which “sexual orientation is codified” on the continent (Lewis, 2011:208) with varying implications from one post-colonial state to another. The use of juridical apparatus in Uganda, for example, could be tracked back to 2005 when the government suggested the extermination of homosexuals in the country (Epprecht, 2010:769). The Ugandan proposition crept into other post-colonial contexts such as Nigeria, Senegal, Malawi and Kenya (Mutua, 2011:457). The replication of homophobic legislation in many post-colonial states could also be interpreted in line with a series of gay/lesbian-related legal battles that were dominant in Zimbabwe, Namibia and Botswana around the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Tamale and Bennett, 2011:4). What these legal battles reveal, as the work of Heng and Devan (1992) suggests, is that besides policing ‘the sexual’, the

criminalisation of sexualities that are counter to mainstream discourses offers a platform for inventing and regenerating hegemonic state power (see Alexander, 1994:6).

The studies done in Uganda, (Obbo, 1989) and Nigeria, (Bakare-Yusuf, 2011) as well as parallel experiences from Asia, Sri Lanka (Tambiah, 2005) reveal that the state regulates gendered bodies and outlines the boundaries of permissible sexual interaction between and among citizens through legal frameworks that police the way women dress. Obbo (1989:85) reads the 1973 decree on dress as part of Idi Amin's broader efforts to control Uganda post-British colonialism through discourses of womanhood. The enforcement of the decree spelling out that "Ugandan women should look dignified like 'our mothers'" (ibid: 81) witnessed the coercive insertion of respectability and morality notions into nationalist discourses. The politics of dress became a category for reconceptualising women's sexuality, and a way through which Amin's nationalist discourses constructed a Ugandan identity based on the meaning of womanhood. The work of Tambiah on Sri Lanka where a dress code was meant to contain women within predetermined gender and sexual parameters (see Kim-Puri, 2005:153), illustrates the intrinsic connection between body patrols and the processes of nation-building.

Legislating and policing the way Ugandan women dressed after British colonial rule doubled as a discursive way of articulating about the economy through politics of the body (Obbo, 1989:79). Similarly, state-sanctioned condemnation of "women's sartorial choices" and the extensive patrol of gendered bodies in post-colonial Nigeria expose complex connections between "sexuality, the state and the economy" (Bakare-Yusuf, 2011:116). Central to the discourses around women's dress and 'nudity', in the wake of shifting economic and material realities, is the theorisation that "young women's bodies have become the site onto which many social insecurities and existential anxieties are projected" (ibid:117). As a result, women are caught up in the politics of nationhood, in which their bodies serve to 'transmit and produce national culture' (see McClintock, 1995:355 & McClintock, 1993:62)⁵.

Wojcicki exposes how contemporary debates on law, gender and sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa overlap with questions of the (de)criminalisation of sex work. Her article, *The Movement to Decriminalise sex Work in Gauteng Province, South Africa, 1994-2002*,

⁵ Drawing from Yuval-Davis, and Anthias, (1989:7)

illustrates that the process of building a new South re-introduced discourses of sexuality and nationhood that had dominated gender debates prior to democracy (Wojcicki, 2003). The ultimate shape the (de)criminalisation debate took was partly influenced by the politics of resource allocation in the ‘new nation’, especially the need to re-channel limited “police resources to serious crimes” (Wojcicki, 2003:87). The experience of post-apartheid South Africa is evidence that women’s bodies in the ‘new democracies’ are enmeshed in the process of setting up the parameters through which the state continues to regulate sexual relations (see McClintock, 1995:355&McClintock, 1993:62)⁶. As a result, many post-colonial African states impose sexual boundaries that patrol citizens, but often fail to locate sex work within the socio-economic frameworks, which according to Bakare-Yusuf (2011:125) thrust women into power-based liaisons (see also Tamale, 2011).

African-focused scholarship reveals that the use of the law as a state vehicle for legitimising the sexual relations between and among gendered citizens is often met with resistance from within the continent. Hence, the need to contest long-standing state policies that undermine women’s sexual rights is always at the centre of feminist activities on the continent (Bennett, 2011:78). The 2011 anthology, *African Sexualities A Reader*, contains an entire section on *Sexuality, power and politics* which several scholars use to expose and theorise about the subversion and resistance that emerge at micro and macro levels in response to the socio-legal frameworks governing sexuality (Nyanzi, 2011:477). Examples include feminist activism in post-colonial Uganda that followed a legal route and challenged the regulation of women’s sexuality by the state, and successfully advocated the rights of non-heterosexual women (Tamale, and Bennett, 2011:4).

Another insightful article that documents the legal activism and struggles for women’s rights in a post-colonial state is Longwe’s *Legal Action to Stop Hotels Discriminating against Women in Zambia*, (2011). Writing from an autobiographical standpoint, Longwe reflects on her experiences with the label ‘unaccompanied woman’ that she earned when she allegedly attempted to enter an access-controlled hotel bar, ‘alone’. The ‘unaccompanied woman’ tag, used by Longwe (2011:103) to define a woman who is not escorted by a male figure, became the basis for legal battles that were/are fought from a very strong women’s rights position in post-colonial Zambia. The ‘Longwe’ case re-echoes the post-colonial legal battles, which

⁶ Drawing from Yuval-Davis, and Anthias, (1989:7)

deconstruct colonial notions of morality that discriminated against women, and their sexuality according to ‘respectability’ dictates (Seidman, 1984; Schmidt, 1990; Gaidzanwa, 1995; Hungwe, 2006). The ‘Longwe’ case indeed transmuted the rights landscape for women who had to negotiate conflicting identities as ‘respectable’ and ‘unaccompanied’ women. However, the on-going discrimination against ‘unrespectable’ and ‘unaccompanied’ women, whose presence in access-controlled spaces is misconstrued for sex work, exposes the shortcomings of legal reform in post-colonial Zambia (Longwe, 2011:98).

The legal shortcomings highlighted above could be attributed to the hierarchised “pluralist legal systems” that many continental governments adopted from a colonial past (Tamale, 2008:50) as they reconfigured the state. Nevertheless, Tamale refrains from rehearsing how post-colonial states use customary law and practices to rationalise legislative strictures imposed on women and their sexuality (ibid: 65). Her work with Bennett (2011:1) focuses on the progressive interplay between the law and gendered discourses – a relationship in which the legal front doubles as “a shield and a sword.” The shield function draws on the potential of the legal front to guard against gender-based discrimination and the undermining of women’s rights while the sword function is rooted in the resistance of “sexist practices” in order to achieve gender equality (ibid:1). The law emerges as a powerful platform from where meaningful gender-based battles could be fought.

A fight about policy

The sub-theme on policy looks into the transmission of HIV, and health care debates that offer scholars an analytic tool for interrogating the link between sexuality and nation-building in post-colonial Africa. *Getting the nation talking about sex*, by Posel (2011) explores the relationship between sexuality and the nation in post-apartheid South Africa. Posel (2011:130) frames sexuality as a politicised discourse based on how it became entangled with the ‘Thabo Mbeki HIV/AIDS controversy’ around 1999/2000, and his political term as the head of South Africa (see also Jackson, 2000). The controversy is read as a somewhat dramatised narrative of how the fights about the shape of sexuality are deeply embedded in nation-building processes (Posel 2011:130). These struggles are visible in the way Mbeki used lenses concerning race to interpret, and dismiss outright what he viewed as allegations of a looming HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa. Mbeki read the pressure put on the government to roll-out HIV treatment to the survivors of rape as a re-emergence of the

essentialist constructions of black African men's sexuality as "rapacious and violent" (ibid: 136-7), and these constructions are also highlighted in the work of Tamale (2011:17), and Epprecht (2010:769).

The discourse of AIDS denialism tried to break away from colonial views that correlate African masculinities with the transmission of the virus (Posel, 2011:137), and the universal depiction of "Africa as the cradle of disease" (Chirimuuta, and Chirimuuta, 1989 cited in Kalipeni et al., 2004:14). One can discern that the discourses of blame that located black Africans at the centre of sexuality theorisations generated complex scholarship on nationalism and HIV/AIDS in post-colonial Africa. The complexity flows from the perception that the adverse impact of HIV/AIDS has the potential to destabilise "the very foundations of democracy" (Bennett, and Reddy, 2007:44) on the continent. For example, at the epicentre of Mbeki's nation-building rhetoric was a 'mortalized' metaphor that represented nationhood through a juxtaposition of life and death (Posel, 2011: 139). One side of the continuum represents death as a formidable force with great potential to prematurely destroy the new democracy (ibid: 139). The metaphor uncovers historically rooted complexities of engaging in African-focused research on the pandemic that takes sex and death centrally into the research design (Kaler, 2010:34).

Writing on HIV/AIDS in Malawi, Lwanda (2004) suggests that African leaders wrestle with the impact of AIDS on flag-democracies in ways that expose the tension-ridden relationship between post-colonial nation-building projects and the reverberations of colonialism (see Kalipeni, et al. 2004:13-4). For example, Mbeki's 'nation-building' discourse drew on the "African renaissance" rhetoric, which he described as the regeneration of a continent that is alienated from a "wretched past" (Posel, 2011:140). Therefore debates on HIV/AIDS stretch beyond disentangling the "interconnections between sex, sexuality and AIDS" (McFadden, 1992:166) to highlight the complex relationship between the pandemic and questions of building new democracies in Africa. The HIV/AIDS controversy in South Africa, for instance, surpassed mere insertions of sex into public discourses and emerged as a symbol of national identity (Posel, 2011:139).

Post-colonial policies and discourses promote the dominance of heteronormativity through constructions of the pandemic on the continent as "distinctly heterosexual" (Phillips, 2004:155; Mutua, 2011:461). The conclusions drawn from empirical research reveal bi-

sexual tendencies among gay men such that the construction of an exclusive heterosexual national identity trivialises the role homosexual contact plays in the spread of the virus (Epprecht, 2010:769; Akeroyd, 2004:90). The upholding of an exclusive heterosexual identity undermines any national attempts to curtail the spread of the killer-virus because the state either sanctions ‘anti-homo’ views through legislation or legitimises biased approaches to HIV/AIDS (Phillips, 2004:160). Researchers therefore blame state-induced denial, shame and the subsequent tagging of homosexuals on the continent for the dearth of information that speaks of homosexual contact as a factor in the spread of HIV (Akeroyd, 2004:90).

Feminists have in the past two decades prioritised the insertion of gender aspects into discourses around the spread of the virus (Bennett, 2011:98) by redirecting methodological and theoretical gazes from HIV prevention approaches that contest “people’s cultures [...]” (Tamale, 2011:22). The notion of “narrow culturalism” by D’Ozon (1998) contends interpretations of the AIDS problematic on the continent in ways that often blame practices like polygamy, but overlook the impact of the political economy (Kaler, 2010:31). Mbilinyi (2010) considers this omission naive (see Tamale, 2011:29) because the political economy has been in the past decade a powerful theoretical lens through which feminist researchers questioned the meaning of nationhood in the ‘new’ democracies like South Africa (Bennett, and Reddy, 2007:44). Researching HIV/AIDS in the aftermath of the Mbeki controversy plunged scholars into a theoretical dilemma such that “advocating the importance of considering poverty when understanding transmission is sometimes automatically aligned with an AIDS-denialist discourse” (ibid: 56). The dilemma has not deterred African-focused scholars from examining the complexities of post-colonial nationalism through debates on HIV/AIDS as a ‘fight about policy’.

The politics of heteronormativity

This sub-theme discusses the rights discourse in the light of the term, heteronormativity, which refers to “the institutionalisation of exclusive heterosexuality in society” (Steyn, and van Zyl, 2009:3). Scholars who theorise in line with the above definition debunk institutions like the family and religion that continuously assign different gender roles to men and women. These scholars deconstruct a heteronormative order for legitimising the ‘men-active-penetrators’ and ‘women-passive-penetrated’ oppositional binary (Epprecht, 2009: v). Contestations over sexuality as it happens in a heteronormative order are mainly about

hegemonic manifestations of ‘maleness’ (Motsei, 2007:33) that have detrimental effects on ‘the fight about rights’. The experiences of ‘being gendered’ in Zimbabwe (Phillips, 2004:156) and South Africa (Lahiri, 2011:121) support the theorisation that the reinforcement of gendered identities through secondary socialisation is indeed violent (Bennett, 2011:96; Butler, 2004).

Heteronormativity patrols sexual interactions between women and men through a process which creates sexual boundaries that should not be crossed otherwise, variance is considered punishable (Caudwell, 2003). Central to this analysis are Foucault’s ideas of how sexuality is located on ‘a legitimate/illegitimate’ binary plane and the subsequent regulation of such by the state through law enforcement measures (Foucault, 1978; translated in 1990:3-4). Nation-building in post-colonial Africa involves the deployment of state power to set up regulating parameters which in contexts like Zimbabwe, Namibia and Uganda normalise heterosexuality and condemn counter-sexualities (Lewis, 2011:208; Epprecht, 2010). Although focus is on the operation of nation-building in Trinidad, Tobago and the Bahamas, analyses that stem from these contexts point at how contested issues of citizenship are (see Alexander, 1994). The establishment of these flag-democracies has been embedded in dense body politics often excluding gendered bodies and sexualities categorised as counter to citizenship,

Not just (any) body can be a citizen anymore, for some bodies have been marked by the state as non-procreative, in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex that is non-productive of babies and of no economic gain. Having refused the heterosexual imperative of citizenship, these bodies, according to the state, pose a profound threat to the very survival of the nation (Alexander, 1994:6).

Gendered citizens constantly negotiate how to live through heavily patrolled bodies marked as heterosexual and procreative, and how to confront hegemonic definitions as well as gendered legislations regulating their sexuality. Deep-seated prejudices suggest that negotiation for identity and belonging to homophobic post-colonial contexts such as Zimbabwe (see Phillips, 2004) is a daily reality. Punitive post-colonial legislations not only impose and institutionalise heterosexuality as ‘the sexuality’ but they ensure that non-complying citizens constantly negotiate ‘the right to be’ in very political and gendered ways (Alexander, 1994:6). A heterosexual identity becomes a symbol of “legitimate national membership” (Tambiah, 2005:258) such that with a homosexual tag, one can ‘never’ be a

true citizen of Zimbabwe, Namibia or Kenya (Phillips, 2004:159). As earlier observed in Trinidad, Tobago and the Bahamas (Alexander, 1994:5), authorities on the continent use the binary to differentiate “insiders” from “outsiders” (Phillips, 2004:159) in spite of the history of sexual diversity in Africa prior to European colonialisms (see Madunagu, 2007:91). It is imperative to note that the discourse around the rights of lesbians and gays is not directly related to my central research question but it has been critical to understanding the shape of nationhood in post-colonial Africa as evidenced by scholarship that repeatedly shows how gendered notions of citizenship and identities are on the continent.

The gendered notion of citizenship is frequently linked to heteronormative constructions that narrowly reduce the scope of sexuality to its procreative ability leaving non-reproductive virtues out of the equation (Makinwa-Adebusoye, and Tiemoko, 2007:1). When sexuality is embroiled with procreation, the hegemonic perception that “old people, children and disabled are asexual” (Epprecht, 2009: v; Nyanzi, 2011; Sait, et al. 2011) marginalises experiences of these sexual minorities. The realisation that it is non-reproductive menopausal women who are framed as ‘old people’ (Makinwa-Adebusoye, and Tiemoko, 2007:10) qualifies elderly women’s sexuality as an uncharted thematic area (Orner, 2007:173). However, a procreation-centred sexuality which prioritises “societal survival than individual rights” (Makinwa-Adebusoye, and Tiemoko, 2007:2) is often challenged by progressive scholars who unravel the realities of non-procreative/homosexual intercourse on the continent (ibid: 4&11). African-focused scholars have discussed heteronormativity from a theoretical position that captures the intricacies and diversity of sexuality on the continent (see Bennett, 2011; Makinwa-Adebusoye, and Tiemoko, 2007) regardless of the precarious conditions under which some of them theorise (see Tamale, 2003). These intellectualisms expose the complexities of sexuality simultaneously opening new ways of theorising about sexual bodies and the post-colonial state in Africa.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter acknowledges and honours the preceding voices that have explored theoretical ideas on sexuality, gender and nation formation. The central theory flowing throughout this chapter frames the politics of gender and sexuality as fundamental to understanding the notion of nationhood at different historical periods. The dominant ideas in this chapter

disentangle the complex conjunctions between gender, sexuality and the operation of nation-building in colonial and post-colonial Africa. I have reviewed a wide range of international and African-focused scholarship that explores the “theoretically and empirically complex” nation-sexuality battle (Ranchod-Nilsson, and Tétreault, 2000:17) as a central theoretical framework for this thesis. The lengthy review of global and continental scholarship offers an incisive reflection on what happens(ed) to the nation/sexuality battle in other colonial and post-colonial contexts. The theoretical framework set here prepares this thesis for an in-depth reading of a ‘nation’ in Chapter 3, and the subsequent analytic chapters on discourses of gendered and sexual lives that renew engagement with notions of Zimbabwe as a ‘nation’.

The scholarship engaged in this chapter illuminates that nation-building projects can be analysed in relation to gender and sexuality and in the process, women’s bodies define and reset national borders ‘whether imagined or real’ (see Anderson, 1983). This international and continental scholarship, approached from questions of rights, offers an incisive reflection on how the nation-sexuality battle impacts on the social construction of women’s lives, and the political nature of their identities. Even though the discussions of nationalism in this chapter have framed women as particularly important in the nation-sexuality battle, it is worth noting that ‘women’ is not a term of consensus (see Anthias, and Yuval-Davis, 1989:1&7). There is a huge range of categorisation of women in the literature where women feature as ‘generic women’, ‘poor women’, ‘young women’ and ‘lesbian women’ among other categories. This thesis asks: When theory refers to the notion of women as bodies through which the ‘fight for ownership of nationhood’ is engaged, which women are being imagined? While many categories of women (young, lesbian and/or black women) are mentioned, there is a theoretical gap on how the politics of gendered nationhood might impact women living in the rural areas, especially in relation to access to new legislation and new rights. In addition, very little theory has been developed from the assumption that becoming gendered as a woman is a lifelong process. As the thesis moves to the next chapter on Zimbabwe, the analytic frame reveals that women towards the latter side of the continuum (elderly women) deserve as much theoretical attention as those who might be categorised as young or poor and so on.

Chapter 3: Framing Zimbabwe as a ‘nation’

This chapter explores gender and sexuality issues in Zimbabwe, as a means for locating my research within the body of literature. I pay considerable attention to the work of dominant scholars⁷ who track ideas about women, gender and sexuality through different research interests including: colonialism and labour, migration, urbanisation, the liberation war, discourses around modernity, HIV/AIDS and policy briefs. The chapter gives a brief historical overview of Zimbabwe as a nation, in particular, I explore events that unfolded prior to and subsequent to the country’s independence. The historical approach maps the literature on ‘states of the nation’ and sexuality in Zimbabwe and it takes the question of gender into the frame of my theorisations. As noted in the introduction, a historical approach creates a discursive context for relating sexuality to visible and invisible structures that have shaped the subject in Zimbabwe. This framework illuminates the intersections of sexuality, socio-political and economic discourses while avoiding “the temptation to romanticise past and present realities” (Mbilinyi, 1992:66).

The historical approach allows me to trace the trajectory of Zimbabwean women’s experiences of being ‘nationalised’ within different periods and different themes, but colonial and post-independence discourses are my principal concern. In exploring the discourses of ‘nationalisms as gendered’ (McClintock, 1995), I first introduce the idea of ‘nation’ as key to Chimurenga and Rhodesian discourses by highlighting the ways in which sexuality, gender and the formation of race were intimately involved in shaping pre-independence rhetoric. Thereafter, the chapter adopts a chronological framework that breaks down Zimbabwe’s thirty-two years of debatable ‘democracy’ into three decades for analytic purposes. The post-independence discussion opens with a critical analysis of the meaning of being ‘nationalised’ in the ‘new Zimbabwe’ between 1980-1990 before delving into gender and sexuality debates that dominated the decades, 1990-2000 and 2000-2010. As the analysis progresses, the framework creates a discursive context where emerging battles around gendered identities and sexualities are purposely subsumed into discourses about contemporary Zimbabwe as a context for research.

⁷Barnes, (2007, 2006 & 1999); Gaidzanwa, (2001, 1994, 1993 & 1992); Kambarami, (2006); Schmidt, (1992) Seidman, (1984); Tsanga, (1999), and many others

The literature that I review positions the intersections between Zimbabwean discourses on nationalism, the various conceptions of women's sexuality and the Zimbabwean trajectories of socio-political change – within the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2. The chapter brings together various pieces that explore what has happened in the past decades by placing emphasis on legal, socio-political and economic reforms, along with the debates on HIV/AIDS, and the escalation of poverty. Although these intertwined discourses have created a nation where elderly women constantly fight to survive, and to “[keep] fragmented families together and rebuild lives in the aftermath of crisis” (Beales, 2000:5), the chapter/thesis is not about analyses that narrowly review state engagements within the three decades as ‘welfarist’. Beyond these survival battles and welfarist state policies lie a much more complex discursive structure from where elderly women's representations of their embodied and gendered sexual experiences could be analysed. At the core of this chapter is the theorisation that through elderly women's embodied experiences of gender and sexuality I can re-imagine the various landscapes that have made Zimbabwe the nation it is today. It is against this backdrop that I perceive elderly women's discourses on gender and sexuality within drastically shifting economic and socio-political contexts – which have not previously been explored by (Zimbabwean) scholars – as central to reading nationhood and the project of nation-building.

Battles of being ‘nationalised’ in colonial Zimbabwe

Questions of sexuality ought to engage with the impact that European colonialisms had on the citizens of the different countries that were forcibly occupied from the 19th to the mid-20th century (Bennett, 2011:81). Scholars have pointed out that questions about gender, womanhood and sexuality were part of the politics of settled land. This section draws on pre-independence gender and sexuality debates of the 1930s and 1940s right into the beginning of the war of liberation and the period just before flag-independence. Dominant scholars who have engaged with the politics of gender and sexuality as part of the colonial contestation over land include Gaidzanwa, (1994), Barnes, (1999), Schmidt, (1992), Jeater, (1993) Phillips, (2011), and Pape, (1990) among others. These scholars explore the notion of colonialism in Zimbabwe through the discursive themes of colonial labour, migration and urbanisation, Chimurenga and Rhodesian discourses to expose how women became sexualised, gendered and nationalised in colonial Zimbabwe.

The politics of migration

When discussing migration, several scholars track and locate ideas of gender and sexuality in colonial Zimbabwe in order to explore how women navigated the complex socio-political landscapes of the time. Discourses of nationhood construct colonial Zimbabwe as a space where the legal framework became part of colonial state apparatus as the means of controlling gendered bodies and sexualities. African women were “denied access to resources” (Seidman, 1984:424), and as perpetual minors at law, they had to negotiate access to health care and contraceptives through men (Njovana, and Watts, 1996:47). Nevertheless, many African women exercised their agency and migrated to urban areas (Seidman, 1984:424) where their bodily rights and autonomy were not subjected to a gendered societal structure controlled by rural patriarchs (see Hungwe, 2006:37-8). The work of Jeater, (1993); Schmidt, (1992); Barnes, and Win, (1992) also suggests that African women migrated from rural to urban areas between the 2nd and 4th decades of the 20th century as a deliberate effort to resist oppressive patriarchal structures (see Wells, 2003:102).

It is noteworthy that migrant women still had to conform to “different but nevertheless demanding forces of patriarchal control” (Gaidzanwa, 1994:13). Migration into towns and mission stations witnessed a shift in the power structures that defined the politics of gender and sexuality. Missionaries, for example, used migration as a tool for controlling black women and their sexuality in the name of ‘purity’ (Hungwe, 2006:39) hence the claim that migration saw a shift from the domination of African patriarchs to that of the European colonial power (Schmidt, 1990:643). Mission stations became platforms where missionaries enforced Western notions of femininity that not only located black women as ‘racial inferiors’ but also confined them to private spaces (Hungwe, 2006:39). That notwithstanding, many women and girls exercised their agency by choosing to subject themselves to stringent Christian mores as opposed to the less tolerable rural patriarchy (Schmidt, 1990:642).

As women migrated into mission stations, urban areas, farms and mines, they resisted the legal restrictions which were designed to patrol their bodies and sexualities by controlling their freedom of movement. The literature on colonial migration suggests there was a constant negotiation between different systems of legal and family-based norms about gender and sexuality. This is a negotiation in which the need to recognize the dominance of

increasing urbanization, of men's migration away from rural areas, and of women's efforts to sustain families and communities creates challenges for researchers.

Colonial labour and urbanisation⁸

Gaidzanwa, among other scholars (Schmidt, 1990; Barnes and Win, 1992; Jeater, 1993; 1996; Barnes, 1999; Hungwe, 2006) documents the politics of living in urban areas of colonial Zimbabwe in terms of a gendered and racialised sexual body. The literature points to the colonial government's efforts to control women's sexualities in urban spaces through the enforcement of prohibitive migration regulations such as pass laws (see Schmidt, 1990:646). The stringent pass laws made it virtually impossible for women – let alone single women – to travel, settle and work in cities and towns of the colony. Controlled labour migration was marked by the departure of men from rural to urban parts of colonial Zimbabwe, which had colossal repercussions on the sexual relations of those racially categorised as black (Jeater, 1993). These prohibitive regulations meant that black men would be forced to endure long periods of sexual inactivity but in reality, the literature suggests the contrary. Parallel to the effects of forced labour migration in apartheid South Africa (Bennett, 2011:82), the Rhodesian colonial structures led to an increase in transactional sex in the residential areas reserved for black migrant men. Bassett and Mhloyi (1991) also expose that it became normative for migrant men located within urban zones to resort to sexual liaisons outside legally sanctioned connubial relationships, as a way of satisfying their sexual needs in the absence of their wives (see Njovana, and Watts, 1996:49).

Scholars critically analyse the diverse ways in which women navigated repressive urbanisation processes and the political labour structures of colonial Rhodesia. Gaidzanwa (1994:13) explores the politics of migrant wage labour and asserts that there was no guarantee of economic liberation for migrant women who lacked a 'qualification' recognised by colonial powers. Tagged as less employable than men, migrant women had very few labour options often limited to the informal sector (Seidman, 1984:424) which exposed women to lengthy working hours and meagre remuneration (Gaidzanwa, 1994:13). The informal jobs open to migrant women (for example, beer brewing or vending) required

⁸ Urbanisation in this context refers to "a constant process of legal and physical war between the state and those seeking to live in zones to which they were not 'legally' entitled" (Bennett, 2011:82).

constant negotiation with law enforcement agents because these transactions were not sanctioned by law (Gaidzanwa, 1993:50).

Out of the colonial urbanisation processes emerged new politics of gender and sexuality which informed the constructions of a complex binary of ‘respectability’ and ‘un-respectability’ that feminist scholars have explored in depth (Hungwe, 2006; Gaidzanwa, 2001). As women negotiated for space within urban settings, their attempts to explore the city or town as sexual beings often earned them the label “*mapoto women*” – a label which denoted ‘un-respectability’. The phrase is a metaphor that referred to women who moved in with men and proceeded to fulfil all wifely obligations before they were married customarily (Hungwe, 2006:34; Jeater, 1993). Body politics became extremely gendered and sexualised as the discourse of un-respectability also became intimately linked to constructions of a woman’s body as a hub and transmitter of diseases (Hungwe, 2006:37; Jackson, 2002:191-2). The ‘*chibheura*’ practice, for instance, saw women coerced into being examined for sexually transmitted infections under the banner of “an anti-venereal disease campaign” (Hungwe, 2006:37). In reality, this was a highly political and violent move that institutionalised the policing of black women’s bodies, and curbing their freedom of movement (Jackson, 2002:191). Colonial state powers succeeded in undermining women’s bodily rights and integrity, and consequently women became ‘nationalised’ as discourses of their sexualised bodies dominated debates and politics of belonging.

The emergence of ‘respectability and un-respectability’ discourses shaped rural-urban migration such that child-bearing which coincided with a women’s temporary or permanent migration to urban zones generated a prostitute tag and heavy criticism from elders living in rural spaces (Hungwe, 2006:34). Many women used these sexual inscriptions, the “negative moral judgments” in particular, to justify their choices to remain in the rural areas (Wells, 2003:106). Colonial urbanisation is thus blamed for alienating Africans from their rural life and significantly destabilising prescribed mores which in the previous order shaped interactional patterns and ideological processes (Haram, 2004:211). An increase in urbanisation for instance, along with increased mobility of men, the shortage of land and access to education through missionary schools destabilised the very foundations of customary marriage especially the practices of *lobola*, arranged and early marriages (Wells, 2003:106). Based on these socio-cultural shifts, the colonial period is read as a complex space

which reconfigured sexuality “vis-à-vis traditionally defined sexual norms, as well as in relation to the urban milieu” (McFadden, 1992:165).

The investigation of the ‘sudden’ presence of women “in the white man’s town” (Jackson, 2002:191) despite prohibitive migration regulations and discriminatory labour practices would be informative. Barnes and Win (1992) assert that women have been in urban areas since the very beginning of colonialism on the subcontinent (Hungwe, 2006:34). The presence of women could in part be attributed to the way colonial administrators somewhat ‘liberalised’ stringent regulations policing the migration of black women into urban spaces (ibid: 38). This decision was a deliberate choice to create a considerable pool of black female domestic workers to substitute a male labour force whose “erotic contact” with the colonial masters’ women was highly feared (ibid: 39). It is also vital to attend to the perception that urban spaces were not only sites for discovering individual capabilities within the racialised wage labour structure. Beyond locating women in gendered employment positions (Gaidzanwa, 1994:13; Gaidzanwa, 1993:50; Seidman, 1984:424), urban milieus doubled as sites that somewhat liberated women from a patriarchal rural order within which in the early 19th century women were heavily invested in farming activities (Hungwe, 2006:34).

Legitimising racialised sexual identities

Scholars interested in the politics of sexuality and colonial power read the meaning of being ‘nationalised’ in colonial Zimbabwe through a dominant discourse – the ‘perils of sex and race’ (Phillips, 2011, McCulloch, 2000, Pape, 1990 and Samasuwo, 1994). Re-echoing the definition provided in Chapter 2, McCulloch (2000) describes ‘black peril’ in colonial Zimbabwe as “the moral panic over alleged sexual assaults by black men on white women in Rhodesia” (see Kaler, 2010:29). Colonial masters constructed gendered sexual relations through the racialised sexual hierarchy that characterised social life in the colony. The enactment of colonial legislations that outlawed sexual interaction “between white women and black men” was based on supposed cases of sexual violence by African men (Pape, 1990:669). These restrictive legal frameworks guaranteed the perpetual existence of a racialised sexual hierarchy in the colony (Phillips, 2011:101).

The racialised ‘perils’ not only reflected the unequal power dynamics that were at play in the colony, rather they significantly contributed towards the construction and preservation of a

racially superior white male order (Pape, 1990:700; Samasuwo, 1994). Colonial Zimbabwe as a result became a space where ‘domineering white male citizens’ had the freedom to explore sexually without any legal restrictions (Pape 1990:699). Consequently, there was underreporting of ‘white peril’ – the high incidence of black women sexually abused by white men – irrespective of widespread condemnation from both white men’s wives and black men (ibid). The discourse of racial supremacy shows how the intersection of gender, class and race worked to legitimise sexual identities and/or relations in colonial Zimbabwe.

Racialised sexual identities were also legitimised through clear racial sexual boundaries for white commercial sex workers for example, which had to limit their clientele base to white men only. Any transgression of these racial boundaries was met with stern punishment, which could include being thrown out of the colony, and these circumstances forced white women to play the victim in order to reclaim their respectability (Hungwe, 2006:39; Pape, 1990; Phillips, 2011). This situation clearly shows how racial boundaries infused the rhetoric of ‘respectable and un-respectable’ women into dominant sexuality discourses. Race emerged as a defining category such that living through bodies racially marked as African “in the white man’s town” (Jackson, 2002:191) meant immense negotiation. For instance, the overall meaning of ‘being Rhodesian’ in this space points at racialised practices especially for women who had to live through extremely policed and politicised bodies.

‘Sex perils’ and the political economy

What is enlightening about an analysis of sexual relations, especially the ‘black peril’ in colonial Rhodesia, is the possibility of re-imagining and profiling the intersection of stratified sexual/labour relations and the political economy, and how black bodies (of either gender) became ‘nationalised.’ A critical mapping of the ‘perils’ by Pape (1990:700) reflects how racism, beyond the racialised sexual order, was embedded in the economic landscape. Pape links the conceptualisation of ‘the perils’ to the way the colonial state powers coerced a significant fraction of African labour into mines, onto farms, and more importantly into domestic service on which the white household economy relied (ibid:701). The coercive nature of the political economy also meant that the presence of African workers in urban spaces was determined by white employers’ labour demands (Hungwe, 2006:36). After

referring to the work of earlier scholars⁹, Pape (1990:701) concludes that indeed Southern Rhodesia had a “labour coercive economy” detrimental to the construction of gendered and sexual tensions about what it meant to live as a ‘black Rhodesian’. The colonial state “imposed [...] its own gender ideology along with new economic relationships” (Seidman, 1984:421) and the political economy became that unshakable foundation on which counter nationalist politics were constructed (Gaidzanwa, 1992:108; Barnes, 2007).

Pre-independence nationalist discourses

Salient to the rise of nationalisms that preceded Zimbabwe’s independence were the interwoven politics of sexuality and power evident in the tensions between rural and colonial patriarchs. Out of the colonial political economy emerged stratified power relations between the two patriarchies, which had an overt interest in managing virtually all aspects of women’s lives (Hungwe, 2006:38; Gaidzanwa, 1993). Rural patriarchs, for instance, read the bending of migration regulations for women by colonial patriarchs as a threat to the very foundations of African male hegemony over women, in particular, with respect to mobility patterns, their earning ability and sexuality (Hungwe, 2006:38). As a result, senior black men held the colonial powers accountable for “female disobedience” and they constantly put pressure on the colonial state to remedy the situation through pass laws (Schimdt, 1990:646). When viewed through feminist lenses these divergent patriarchal power battles alert me to how gendered nationalist politics were. The sexual harassment of women who did not buy into early anti-colonial discourses, for instance, confirms that a woman’s body became extremely ‘nationalised’ and doubled as a battleground for nationalist struggles (Epprecht, 1998:642). The gendered nationalisms of the competing patriarchies depict the notion of ‘nation’ as key to contestations over settled and unsettled land that manifested in the Chimurenga and Rhodesian discourses in the last two decades before flag-democracy. The agency women exercised as they engaged in the ‘fights about their rights’ constitutes the politics of re-negotiating how to live through a gendered and sexualised body in a racially stratified colonial state.

Meaning(s) of being ‘nationalised’ post-independence

⁹ Yoshikuni, (1987); Phimister & Van Onselen, (1978); and Van Onselen, (1976)

Out of the colonial history emerged a wave of politics around questions of gender and sexuality which scholars studied in order to interpret ‘new’ ways and meaning(s) of ‘being Zimbabwean’. Given that the Chimurenga discourse was deeply embedded in the nationalist discourse, key government aspirations at independence included redressing past racial injustices and gender-based prejudices (Muzondidya, 2009:167). Thus scholars writing during the independence era and in subsequent years grappled with emerging gender and sexuality debates and the politics of belonging to the newly acclaimed sovereign state. Scholars tracked and interrogated the ideological and conceptual changes to the way that black African women in particular, could live through racialised, gendered and sexualised bodies in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

As underscored in the introduction of this chapter, I now explore the politics of gender and sexuality of the thirty-two-year-old nation. The first section deals with the politics of constructing the ‘new democratic nation’, and then I proceed to analyse the discourses that emerged ‘ten years later’, as well as those relating to Zimbabwe in the 21st century – eras which constitute the second and third decades of independence.

A ‘Democratic’ Zimbabwe

Central discussion here stems from complex discourses about the status of women in the 1980s where different stakeholders battled over the shape of Zimbabwe as a ‘new nation’. At independence, some of the debates were focused on the re-conceptualisation of the notion of nationhood as well as re-defining the meaning of ‘being a Zimbabwean woman’ in a ‘new democracy’. The central concern of the new government during this period was reconfiguring a nation “deeply divided along the lines of race, class, ethnicity, gender and geography” (Muzondidya, 2009:167). The literature that I have delved into tells the story about the complex discourses of ‘the nation’, and of the impact of these on women’s gendered and sexual lives in relation to labour, transnational possibilities (travel), legal reform and general access to opportunities in Zimbabwe. Broadly, the focus is on literature that provides insights into the politics around the meaning of living a ‘newly’ acquired identity that came with flag-independence. It is through such literature that I map the route of the setting up of the discursive parameters which determined who belonged to the new Zimbabwe, and which subsequently shaped the dominant politics around ‘being Zimbabwean’.

‘Women’s rights’ discourse

Emerging from literature is detailed material about the new government’s preoccupation with the ‘rights’ discourse which previously was the core rhetoric of the liberation struggle and nationalist politics (Barnes, 2007:13; Gaidzanwa, 1992). The central objective of nation-building was to expand the scope of citizenship to ensure that African people had rights and responsibilities within the new democracy (Barnes, 2007:13). In principle, the new government at independence framed notions of ‘nationhood’ in terms of the ‘rights’ discourse on which the political legitimacy of the war of liberation was built (Gaidzanwa, 1992:114) but women’s experiences of being ‘nationalised’ post-1980 suggest otherwise.

The article *Citizenship, Nationality, Gender and Class in Southern Africa*, (Gaidzanwa, 1993) captures gender aspects that dominated nationhood debates, or the politics of belonging to the ‘new nation’. Zimbabwean women who migrated and mobilised “support for the liberation movement” abroad where they married foreign husbands discovered how political and gendered issues of citizenship were upon returning to the ‘new nation’ (ibid: 45). For example, foreign husbands of these migrant women did not have the same rights as foreign wives of Zimbabwean men who could either become residents or citizens of the new nation (ibid). The independent state inherited some of the patriarchal, oppressive and discriminatory structures that had defined the politics of gendered citizenship, identity and belonging in colonial Zimbabwe – hence the need to interrogate how ‘new’ the ‘new nation’ was.

At independence, the politics of gender and those of sexuality had predominantly to do with the resistance from within as women constantly called upon the new government to eliminate “legal and non-legal” barriers which excluded them from enjoying equal citizens’ rights with men (Gaidzanwa, 1992:113; Seidman, 1984). The politics of gender and sexuality in this decade entailed revisiting and reworking legal frameworks to ensure that women could enjoy full citizenship rights. *The Status of Women in Zimbabwe* by Coldham (1999) draws on Tsanga (1999) to illustrate how gendered court battles such as the legendary Magaya versus Magaya over the inheritance powers of daughters, were fought in the first decade of independence. This court battle not only shook the legal fraternity but brought to the fore contradictions and tensions of previously enacted native laws – inconsistencies between the Legal Majority Act of 1982 and the customary law in relation to inheritance (Coldham, 1999:248). The highly contested court battle served as a discursive platform on which legal

pieces were interpreted, and the tensions and contradictions deeply entrenched in the law of Zimbabwe were deliberated and revised. A review of the Constitution at that time showed that the highest law in the land offered protection from virtually all forms of discrimination except for gender/sex based prejudices (ibid).

Subsequent to unravelling major inadequacies of the Zimbabwean law, *Magaya versus Magaya* proved to be a milestone in the struggle for women's rights in the new nation. The court case is widely recognised within legal and gender scholarship for transforming and shifting 'women's rights' discourse, and simultaneously affording the legal fraternity a new face regardless of the gendered inequalities women of that generation continued to experience (Seidman, 1984:434-5). The various legal reforms which attempted to redress past racial and gender imbalances create an image of the new nation as deeply committed to the 'women's rights' discourse.

The legal reforms associated within the first decade of independence had a huge impact on issues of maintenance, guardianship or custody, but the continued existence of discriminatory practices in customary law had deleterious consequences. Although the central objective of the Majority Act was to remedy the gendered discrimination of customary law (Rwezaura, 1989:15), women continued to be subject to the power of the family patriarchs when it came to making decisions that affected their bodies and sexualities (Njovana and Watts, 1996:47). The national Constitution was in need of legal reform post-*Magaya versus Magaya* in order to eliminate discriminatory clauses of customary law ensuring that the revised Constitution would guard against sex and gender discrimination (Coldham, 1999:252). Justice Advocates Muchechetere and MacNally at the time stated that a 'mutual relationship' had to exist between the Majority Act and customary law such that the rights women were entitled to under the Act neither distorted nor replaced customary law (ibid:250). Although the Majority Act was pivotal to the politics of gender in Zimbabwe (Gaidzanwa, 1992:113) in reality, the legal inadequacies that dominated the first decade of independence witnessed the proliferation of 'women's rights NGOs' such as Women and Law in Southern Africa, and Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network headquartered in Harare.

The 1983 'anti-prostitution' campaign

What is controversial about the nationalisation of women through the 'rights' discourse is the limited freedom that women enjoyed irrespective of the laws that were meant to protect their sexual rights and integrity. A graphic example would be the alleged anti-prostitution campaign of 1983 – dubbed 'Operation-clean-up' – that witnessed the detention of women who were randomly picked up from both public and private spaces (Seidman, 1984:419; Gaidzanwa, 1992:115; Win, 2004:20). Intense gender debates flowed from this campaign, especially the fact that repressive state apparatus used marriage certificates to establish a woman's moral standing, and this became the basis on which women were released from detention, (Gaidzanwa, 1992:115). Protests against the campaign fought for the freedom of movement for women, without qualification, that is without them being supported by a man or requiring a marriage certificate or proof of employment (see Seidman, 1984:419; Gaidzanwa, 1992). The protests were centred on "the indiscriminate harassment of women" but were not against the discrimination of women tagged as prostitutes or their subsequent relocation to the so-called "rural resettlement camp" (Seidman, 1984:419). The demonstrators stood up for the rights of women categorised as morally upright irrespective of their marital status (Gaidzanwa, 1992:115). The anti-prostitution campaign was welcomed by many women's groups which sanctioned this discriminatory exercise in the name of salvaging the family institution from an allegedly 'immoral' industry (Seidman, 1984:419-20).

In reviewing the anti-prostitution campaign, I identified the major discourses that characterised the gender debate in this 'new nation'. The branding of women as prostitutes resuscitated the discourse of 'respectability' that had dominated the politics of gender and sexuality in colonial Zimbabwe. Literature shows how the discourse around 'respectability and un-respectability', within colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe, has shaped the politics of gender and sexuality in two different historical periods (see Gaidzanwa, 2001; Hungwe, 2006). The fact that the ideas that legitimised the anti-prostitution campaign were rooted in "a pre-independence vagrancy law" (Seidman, 1984:419) re-echoes how the colonial state used to control women's sexuality. When the random "round ups of women" are interpreted as an expression of the discourses of power, one could infer that they were a deliberate strategy to reaffirm patriarchal hegemony over women in the home and beyond (Gaidzanwa, 1992:115). The campaign could be read as a complex way of re/defining 'a Zimbabwean woman' so as to limit the rights she could enjoy. The framing of jobless and single women as prostitutes, which could also be traced back to the colonial policing of women, profoundly shaped the boundaries of morality in the 'new nation'. The tagging of women in mainstream nationalist

discourses, which went uncontested, points out the limited progress towards gender equity in the new democracy (Seidman, 1984:420). Hence the conclusion half way into the first decade of independence that

[...] women had no actual sovereignty or individual standing independent of who they laboured for or were subordinated to in the new nation (Gaidzanwa, 1992:118).

Central to the 1983 campaign are the contradictions in state action. It is ironic that the state that had recently granted women the majority status could deprive women of their right as citizens to freedom of movement, through indiscriminate detentions (Gaidzanwa, 1992:116; Seidman, 1984). The new state used women's relationship with men to set the boundaries of acceptable notions of womanhood and sexuality, and transgressors were ostracised. This analysis shows a clear resemblance between attitudes of the colonial government and the new one. The latter simply continued the colonial discourses of controlling socio-political and economic structures in which gendered notions of subjugation were perpetuated (Gaidzanwa, 1992:116).

Gendered access to opportunities

Scholars interested in this topic unpack and broaden the construction of nationhood discourses beyond political rights that gave women the vote at independence. The language used here shifts attention from the re-codification of legislative frameworks around the majority age and customary law to incorporate discourses about women's access to opportunities in all spheres of life. At first, the gender discourses in the 'new nation' had to do with "re-domestication of Zimbabwean women" (Gaidzanwa, 1992:116) irrespective of how the war space had 'masculinised' them. Patriarchal forces behind re-domestication included the pressure to return to 'normality' (Seidman, 1984:433) where former female freedom fighters had to resume their gendered responsibilities in the private sphere (Hungwe, 2006:41; Barnes, 2007). A gendered analysis of shifting labour relations at independence also shows how women – who had acquired some formal education through the colonial structures (Gaidzanwa, 1992), or those who had benefited from the education privilege extended to female freedom fighters (Lyons, 2004) – had to navigate a male-dominated labour market. Work opportunities beyond the confines of the home were limited to

conventionally gendered sectors (Seidman, 1984:433) where women could be secretaries, teachers and nurses – occupations that were held to be ‘respectable’ (Hungwe, 2006:41).

Although educated and gainfully employed African women could enjoy the legal reform of 1982 beyond the marriage institution (Gaidzanwa, 1992:115), those who were able to enter into the political structures of the new government had to deal with male hegemony and resistance. Moves towards gender equality in these spaces were often de-legitimised by the arbitrary tagging of women as ‘prostitutes’ (Hungwe, 2006:43). Women politicians’ voices and their attempts to enforce ideological and structural shifts within women-oriented state machinery such as the Ministry of Community Development and Women’s Affairs were resisted by a predominantly patriarchal government (Seidman, 1984:432). Women politicians had to conform to patriarchal interests and ordinary women had to constantly navigate gendered barriers within the new Zimbabwe (Gaidzanwa, 1992:116).

Access to education in the first decade of independence was extremely gendered yet it was one of the major avenues through which black women could be empowered and remain relevant to the shifting landscapes (Seidman, 1983:423). Women navigated these gendered and politicised spaces regardless of the oppressive educational structures rooted in the colonial state and the patriarchal society, which trivialised the education of women. The politics of gendered access to education at post-elementary and secondary school levels manifested as limited presence of women in academia prior to independence. Drawing on her personal trajectories, firstly as “a female student from 1976 to 1978” at the then University of Rhodesia, and secondly as a “sub-warden of one of the female residences, from 1979 to 1980”, and finally as “a lecturer from 1983”, Gaidzanwa (1993:15) portrays how gendered the university space was as early as 1976. The dominant presence of ‘black males’ in students politics post-1980 as white students left for South African universities (ibid: 18) resulted in gendered power relations, which often meant that “female students [were] subjected to hostility and harassment” (ibid: 22; see also Barnes, 2007:18). Student leadership structures became pockets of gender-based discrimination within academia.

Out of the intersection of gender and class within the university space emerged the politics of dressing/clothing which generated stereotypes, especially for students who hailed from “severe rural backgrounds”, commonly known as SRBs (Gaidzanwa, 1993:23). The female and male students who constituted this echelon were all perceived as “unpolished [and]

unsophisticated” but ‘female SRBs’ were particularly tagged as “retiring and shy” by students who came from middle and urban working class environments (ibid). Discourses of dressing/clothing demarcated class boundaries and doubled as discursive lenses for reading the embodied experiences of ‘female SRBs’ within academic spaces.

Further scrutiny of the gendered nationalisms during the first decade suggests that limited access to opportunities in the new nation somewhat mirrors colonial wage labour structures that channelled women into menial jobs (Gaidzanwa, 1994:13). Parallel to the colonial structure in which women fought for “their right to mobility” to secure a spot in the capitalist order (McFadden, 1992:164), cross-border mobility illuminates how gendered access to opportunities was for women post-1980. The increased presence of women in cross border trading generated tremendous tensions because men perceived the industry as their preserve, while women considered trading to offer better economic opportunities (Gaidzanwa, 1993:50) compared to the wages they earned prior to 1980 (Gaidzanwa, 1994:13).

Although Wells (2004:106) frames the process of urbanisation at independence as “a viable option relieved of its former harsh moral stigma” scholarship points to the persistent tagging of mobile women in mainstream discourses. Women who crossed the “boundaries of mobility” that were meant to confine them within a set of gendered occupations were labelled ‘prostitutes’ based on pre/colonial constructions of ‘female prostitutes’ as “*pfambi*” – literally interpreted as “one who walks” (Hungwe, 2006:41). Ironically, men who traded in response to socio-economic and political shifts that characterised the first decade of independence (Gaidzanwa, 1993:49) were spared from the tagging (Hungwe, 2006:41). The immunity of male traders or travellers to sexual branding could be attributed to a patriarchal order that often underplayed and excluded men from narratives of prostitution (see Seidman, 1984:435).

Transnational mobility and state control

The salient discourse emerging from the analysis of gendered access to opportunities exposes how women in post-colonial Zimbabwe had to negotiate with despotic notions of nationhood connected to virtually all aspects of their gendered and sexualised bodies. For instance, women who allegedly smuggled goods into the country, around 1990, were subjected to “physically humiliating searches” at entry and exit points (Gaidzanwa, 1993:52). These vaginal searches violated women’s bodily rights by invading and patrolling that which is

supposed to be private. The resurgence of battles on gendered mobility post-1980 echoes colonial parameters that policed and limited the movement of women (Gaidzanwa, 1994; Schmidt, 1990) – structures the ‘new government’ claimed to have destabilised through the liberation struggle.

Gaidzanwa (1993:52) reads the attempt to de-legitimise ordinary people’s (mainly women) transnational trading activities as a political matter that generated complex nationhood discourses. The state, for instance, decried women as unpatriotic citizens who undermined “the independence struggle in South Africa by buying goods produced by exploited labour with hard-earned Zimbabwean foreign currency” (ibid:52). Consequently, the politics of transnational mobility became intricately entangled with that of identity. State departments condemned applications for travel documents from women because they were alleged to have had acquired passports through unscrupulous avenues (ibid: 52). Paradoxically, the same state which was depriving its citizens of their rights to national identity had previously encouraged people to apply for such documents on political grounds in order to ensure an increase in the number of people who registered to vote following the low voter registration in the general elections of 1985 and 1990 (ibid:53). The way government encouraged people to apply for such documents and legitimised proof of accommodation as guaranteeing the right to vote (ibid) shows how state power is often used to manipulate the political system.

Ten years later

Nationalisms and government action in the first decade of independence sparked off thought-provoking gender and sexuality debates that significantly contributed to intellectual scholarship and feminist activism a decade into ‘democracy’. The decade 1990 to 2000 was a decade in which notions of nationhood for women became intricately enmeshed with the realities of HIV/AIDS, and shifting economic landscapes subsequent to the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes of 1991 in Zimbabwe (see Mutangadura, 2001). A gendered review of the decade suggests that the economic reforms severely impacted on women due to their economic function that sustains the household (see Kanji, and Jazdowska, 1993:12). This analysis goes beyond the politics of survival and places emphasis on much deeper and more complex gender debates that emerged as women battled to curtail the impact of HIV/AIDS and the escalation of poverty in this decade.

The escalation of poverty

The economic reforms alluded to above and the subsequent escalation of poverty indeed shifted norms around notions of women and their sexuality. Structural factors that lead to the escalation of poverty had an impact on young women's sexual behaviour in Zimbabwe. Research findings by Bourdillon (2000) and Gwaunza et al. (1994) suggest a correlation between economic shifts and an increase in the number of school dropouts, which left more children destitute and exposed to the risks of transactional sex, often with older men (see Mashamba, and Robson, 2002:275). Statistical interpretations that attribute "the high adult HIV prevalence (43%) in Francistown to Zimbabwean and Zambian female traders" (Jackson, 2000:31) also pointed to shifting sexual norms and relations along border sites as more and more women ventured into cross-border trading in the decade after independence. Although there is frequent mention of a mounting demand for transactional sex along entry and exit posts, the literature does not adequately interrogate why women perceived transactional sex as a viable trade (ibid) in the face of escalating poverty. Central discourses here hint at a reciprocal relationship between HIV/AIDS, economic crisis and the escalation of poverty (Schoepf, 2004:15; McFadden, 1992:192). The collective effects of these entangled discourses tremendously changed the politics around women and their sexuality as Zimbabwean women explored transnational opportunities in increasing numbers.

The discourses of HIV/AIDS

Scholarship on HIV/AIDS in the late 20th century pushed the politics of the body out of private sphere, and such politics provided a lens through which feminists on the continent could examine discourses of sexuality (McFadden, 1992:158). Scholars writing on the politics of gender and sexuality in Zimbabwe virtually two decades after independence became preoccupied with discourses around the emerging HIV/AIDS crisis and how it impacted on women and their sexuality (Jackson, 2000). Intellectual debates predominantly explored the challenge HIV/AIDS posed on the fights for sexual rights and sexual pleasure that women had fought and won under the colonial system (McFadden, 1992:165). For instance, women had previously won the battle to read the phenomenon of multiple partners as a right to choose with whom they could engage sexually (ibid). The pandemic endangered the existence of structures through which women could engage sexually and procreate outside the boundaries of a patriarchal order (ibid).

UNAIDS (2000) representation that “800 000 out of the 1 400 000 million adults between 15 and 49 years living with HIV/AIDS in the country by December 1999 were women” (see Jackson, 2000:12) indicates a ‘gendered nationalisation’ of the pandemic, for its magnitude is measured by the impact on women. A gendered response to HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe in this decade was evidenced by skewed HIV-prevention programmes in the sex industry that focused on women, but excluded men who engaged in transactional sex as a vital group to be reached by HIV/AIDS awareness materials (Hungwe, 2006:42).

Biased approaches to HIV/AIDS are also illustrated by interpretations of the pandemic in the light of an exclusive heteronormative structure in Southern Africa, which in Zimbabwe is reinforced by the state’s preconceived constructions of a homophobic nation (Phillips, 2004:159-160). Homophobic attitudes force citizens into complex gendered binaries intimately connected to discourses of ‘exclusion and infection’ (ibid: 160). For instance, the National AIDS Coordination Programme (1998a) points at the failure of massive state-run campaigns to accept the reality of non-heterosexual sex and its role in the spread of HIV (see Phillips, 2004:160). This state sanctioned approach had deleterious effects on overall handling of the pandemic in Zimbabwe. For instance, Robert Mugabe’s widely quoted homophobic utterances in this decade (Phillips 2004; Epprecht, 2010) confirm ideological dominance of the powerful, and the way inherent state power is used to either legitimise or de-legitimise sexualities. The assertion that non-heterosexuals “should have no rights whatsoever and are behaving worse than pigs and dogs” quoted from *The Herald* of August 12, 1995 (see Phillips, 2004:157) suggests that as the state condemns homosexuality it reinforces the supremacy of heterosexuality. The outright condemnation of homosexuals by Anias Chigwedere¹⁰ – deeply embedded in the complex support of culture or tradition (see Phillips, 2004:157) – sets parameters for distinguishing that which is Zimbabwean from anything perceived as foreign. Zimbabwe becomes a nation where being gay often means negotiating a publicly denounced identity (Epprecht, 2010) and navigating violent (sometimes fatal) circumstances (Phillips, 1997:484). The discourses of HIV/AIDS and the political discourse of sexual orientation emerged in the decade 1990-2000 as central to ‘the fight about citizenship and identity’ in Zimbabwe, a predominantly heteronormative state where gays and lesbians perpetually live as foreigners in what is supposed to be ‘home’.

¹⁰ See *Zimbabwe Parliamentary Debate* September 28, 1995, Hansard pp, 2279-2781; see also *The Citizen*, August 12, 1995

Gender activism in the Beijing decade

Jackson (2000:88) asserts that “a general context of poverty and hardship has the potential to aggravate tension, social unrest and violence and to exacerbate gender inequalities.” The claim resonates with how socio-economic challenges of the 1990-2000 decade intensified gender debates and huge activism in Zimbabwe. Women took up a vast range of issues in the name of feminisms as part of their continuous struggle to attain and enjoy full citizen rights. The establishment of more gender-sensitive organisations became one of the most rational decisions for feminist movements to undertake in order to buttress women’s position within a deepening socio-political and economic crisis. Similar to the 1980-1990 decade, the Beijing decade saw the proliferation of ‘women’s rights NGOs’ such as Musasa Project (Win, 2004:21; Njovana, and Watts, 1996). Musasa Project made the fight about security, anti-patriarchal discourses and interrogating state engagement with women’s rights its main concern, while Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Centre and Network embraced women’s rights in view of an emerging HIV crisis (Win, 2004:21). Gender activism and movement-building illustrate how women within the new democracy frequently countered a patriarchal order that has conventionally subordinated them to inferior positions.

Zimbabwe in the 21st Century

The decade 2000-2010 witnessed shifts in Zimbabwe’s political landscape, which manifested through the emergence of counter political discourses (Win, 2004:19) dominant enough to conclude that “2000 was a new political moment in the history of Zimbabwe” (ibid:25). These circumstances plunged the country into a very deep and intricate socio-political and economic conflict. Nationhood discourses in this decade revolved around contestations over land that culminated into the fast-track redistribution of land (Walker, 2001a:115). While the land question was legitimised by the need to reclaim land from ‘the hands of colonial imperialists’ and return it to its rightful owners, the terms defining the redistribution programme were highly political and gendered. The dominant and divisive land politics were replete with inequalities because the redistribution favoured men, invariably elite patriarchs, (Raftopoulos, 2009:218; Amanor-Wilks, 2009:40) at the expense of women, some who had actively participated in contestations over land.

Deeper nationhood debates in the 21st century stem from government initiatives which have often had serious repercussions on citizens and their rights. For instance, the government implementation of ‘*Operation Murambatsvina*’ in 2005 generated critical questions around nationhood and the broad ‘rights’ discourse. Directly translated, ‘*Operation Murambatsvina*’ means “clear the filth”, but a somewhat ‘sanitised’ government translation is “restore order” (Human Rights Watch, 2007:3-5). Whatever translation one adopts, this abruptly implemented exercise paradoxically succeeded in disrupting people’s way of life instead of ‘restoring sanity’ to urban Zimbabwe. The pervasive violation of human rights in this context suggests that the government discarded the nationhood framework which had previously entrenched a ‘rights’ discourse. ‘*Murambatsvina*’ undermined citizens’ rights to health care by interrupting the roll out of ART (Zimbabwe Human Rights Report, 2008) and women constituted a huge number of those affected because of their gendered vulnerability to infection. For example, women dominated reports of the damages done by ‘*Murambatsvina*’ (Tibaijuka, 2005) albeit in ‘marginalised identities’ as breadwinners, widows and the elderly.

Drawing on my personal observations of how ‘*Murambatsvina*’ unfolded, the operation displaced women who had previously negotiated colonial structural barriers, and were still trying to find their feet in the ‘new nation’ where they occupied ‘illegal’ urban spaces. The exercise undermined women’s sexual rights and privacy, for example squatting with ‘obliquely affected’ relatives meant married women shared a room with other homeless couples and their children. Furthermore, ‘*Murambatsvina*’ encompassed ‘cleaning up’ of streets through de-legitimising street vending, and the rounding-up of sex workers and street children. Hence the conclusion that ‘*Murambatsvina*’s controversial objective – to ‘restore sanity’ in urban areas – resembles the colonial structures governing urban spaces (see Seidman, 1984:419). Nationalisms here have shifted towards a framework which seems to protect state politics such that women located in contemporary Zimbabwe continue to navigate politicised terrains as they endeavour to enjoy their rights as full citizens three decades into ‘democracy’.

Overall, an in-depth analysis of discourses on Zimbabwe in the 21st century hints at the construction of Zimbabwe (by the leadership) as a modern, controlled and civilized nation. Such an analysis pushes one to think of contemporary discourses about nationhood as a reformist and paternal environment controlled by Mugabe, in which citizenship is very much both about being a nation and about being under the eye of the state.

Zimbabwe as a context for gender and sexuality research

Literature reviewed in this section is connected to the previous analyses of the colonial and post-colonial contexts by the recognition that “all nationalisms are gendered” (McClintock, 1995:352) and gender dynamics involve the politics of sexuality. The section delves into discourses of modernity and culture, as well as research that arose in Zimbabwe as a result of the intersections of HIV/AIDS, notions of ‘at risk’ populations and the concentration upon young girls as vectors of disease. These discourses provide inroads into salient research on reproduction, especially the re-emergence of conservative state policies on contraception, marriage and gender identity. Thus the analysis of Zimbabwe as a context for research on the politics of gender and sexuality is about scholarship that exposes and deconstructs “a nationalist approach to sexuality” (Phillips, 2004:159), which repeatedly shows how gendered notions of citizenship and identities are in Zimbabwe.

Discourses of modernity

Emphasis here is on literature that explores questions of culture, sexuality and gender that are framed within the meanings of ‘new nationhood’. Central to this section is the legal material from the Women and Law in Southern Africa project (see Armstrong, 1995:162) which locates ‘custom’ as fluid, changing; and deeply embedded in the discursive battles around ‘modern’ sexualities. As women navigate gendered cultural landscapes, they consider such fluidity not only as a means for resisting hegemonic impositions that repress their sexual rights, but also as a tool for re-negotiating notions of sexuality in the ‘new nation’. Drawing on university students’ essays, Wells (2003) analyses how the politics of gender, sexuality and culture have manifested for different generations of Zimbabwean women over the years. The essays describe the 1990 generation as “having arrived” or “emerging from the muddy soil of political as well as cultural oppression” (ibid:107). These representations are linked to contemporary questions and meanings of ‘being Zimbabwean’ entrenched in post-1980 conceptualisations of nationhood that allowed women to access education opportunities – a move that greatly shapes their lived realities (ibid). Education, within discourses of modernity, is perceived as a major way for the ‘born free’ generation to enjoy socio-economic autonomy (ibid). Discourses of modernity in contemporary Zimbabwe have

become a powerful mechanism for women to interrogate long-standing hegemonic practices and ideologies which are often sanctioned by the state in the name of culture.

Discourses around reproductive rights and health

The state's preoccupation with the politics of gender and sexuality often broadens the discourses of HIV to incorporate discourses around women's reproductive rights and health. By this means, the state defines the terms of living through a gendered body within its boundaries. The meaning of 'being Zimbabwean' is often framed in terms of the incessant control of women and their sexuality by the state through conservative policies on contraception and marriage. Zimbabwe is a nation that supports hegemonic traditional belief systems, and the intersection of such with constitutional law offers researchers an opportunity to deconstruct the legal framework for upholding discriminatory practices that violate women's sexual and reproductive health rights in the 'new nationhood' (see Masenda-Nzira, 2003).

It appears that as the state upholds the legal Age of Majority Act with its original clauses on settlement of *lobola* (Tichagwa, 1998:79), it regulates marriage patterns through its 'loyal' support for 'tradition' despite the negative effects of the same on women's rights. The work of Parpart and Staudt (1989:4) who assert that "states institutionalise men's control of women's productive and reproductive labour" (see Turshen, 2001:86) through long-standing traditional practices that grant men authority over all reproductive issues (Masenda-Nzira, 2003:8; Seidman, 1984) supports this conclusion. Gender-based violence in this instance takes the form of severe disruptions of bodily rights and integrity as women are reduced to reproductive objects. Zimbabwean women, on the other hand, persist in their resistance to hegemonic patriarchal ideologies as can be seen by their choice to use birth control measures clandestinely, not only "out of fear of violence" (Njovana, and Watts, 1996:50), but as a way of reclaiming their bodily rights.

Despite widespread condemnation from a religious perspective, unequal and coercive sexual relations which violate women's bodily rights continue to dominate debates on the legal framework governing the institution of marriage in Zimbabwe. In practice, customary law in Zimbabwe seldom draws from international documents on sexual and reproductive health rights. Thus the meaning of 'being Zimbabwean' is constructed in the light of the blatant

tension between notions of Zimbabwean citizenship as lived through a relationship to international (and signed) policy participation and notions of citizenship which reject the international as the 'West'. The controversial support for 'tradition' entrenched in the pressing need to preserve "the national heritage" (Seidman, 184:432) could be read as a way of disengaging from the 'West' to protect boundaries of the acclaimed sovereign state.

The politics of abortion

The state through the legislation on abortion controls the circumstances under which a woman can terminate pregnancy. Although survivors of rape who subsequently fall pregnant are protected by the Termination of Pregnancy ACT of 1977, Tichagwa (1998:63) frames the same ACT as a barrier to the provision of lawful abortion services given that getting permission for a legal abortion is a protracted process. In addition to the complex legal landscape, pregnant teenagers face massive social disapproval. These factors leave women with illegal backyard abortions as the only way out, which has huge reproductive health consequences. It is vital to note that there are many more abortions than what official figures suggest. This misrepresentation of the impact of illegal abortion in the country is attributed to the criminal tag attached to the practice (Mashamba, and Robson, 2002:274). The discourse has generated intense but polarised debate on "the liberalization and decriminalization of abortion" in Zimbabwe (CEDAW/Zimbabwe, 1998¹¹). The chasm dividing the "pro-life" and "pro-choice" groups (Tichagwa, 1998:63) suggests that the discourse of abortion is politically volatile and appears to separate 'true' Zimbabweans from 'unpatriotic' ones, that is those whose views run counter to the 'national' views of the practice.

The notion of 'at risk' reveals that discourses of HIV have led to the framing of young women as 'vectors' of disease, and the re-emergence of conservative state policies on contraception. The politics of gender and sexuality among Zimbabwe's youth hint at how contested the terrain of reproductive health education is. The law clearly prescribes who should have unrestricted access to reproductive health services. For instance, the only time that "the provision of family planning supplies to young people below 16 years" becomes legal is when "parental consent is given or [when] they are married" (Mashamba, and Robson, 2002:274-5). The legal waiver draws on the argument that when a minor is sexually

¹¹ See paragraph 159

active, the risk of sexual infection increases indisputably. However, research findings suggest that some service providers deny sexually active teenagers access to contraceptives despite the legal waiver (CEDAW/Zimbabwe, 1998¹²). Limited access to information and contraceptives that are supposed to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies and sexual infections locates young women in an awkward position. They cannot have an abortion, nor can they proceed with their studies (ibid¹³) as the gendered state regulations resemble the colonial order where authorities expelled pregnant teenagers from school (Seidman, 1983:423). Adolescents' experiences of 'being nationalised' leave the young women themselves and reproductive rights and health activists questioning the meaning of citizenship for Zimbabwean women.

Health care policy briefs

Flowing from the larger and more complex discourses about Zimbabwe as a 'new nation' is the health care issue. Although my thesis is not about reviewing state policies on welfare, I perceive policy briefs on the shifts around health care a vital thread in telling the story about Zimbabwe. Around 1980, development entailed the provision of health care and other essential services (Win, 2004:20). The Primary Health Care for All policy aligned to Section VI of the Alma-Ata Declaration, 1978 was a strategy for ensuring that health care services were relatively near "where the people live[d] and work[ed]" right across Zimbabwe (Ramji, 1990:49). Government efforts to set up a comprehensive and integrated health care system also entailed the incorporation of the traditional healers and mid-wives into the Western based medical practice (Tichagwa, 1998:73; Barrett, 1996). The Ministry of Health "provided the legal framework for supervising traditional healers, including midwives [as well as] training programmes for traditional mid-wives to carry out safe deliveries and minimise health risks for both the mother and child" (Tichagwa, 1998:73). Other countrywide initiatives included the roll-out of short and long-term contraceptive programmes through Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council which was enacted in 1985 (ibid:74) and the "waiting shelter" project which, in spite of infrastructural limitations, improved access to antenatal services for less complicated pregnancies considerably (ibid:73). Women's sexual and reproductive concerns were core to the provision of health care in this era.

¹² See paragraph 148

¹³ See paragraph 150

Subsequent to the adoption and implementation of the 1990 economic reforms, the government reduced funding to the health sector which resulted in the exodus of qualified personnel and shortage of essential medical drugs (see Grey-Johnson, 1990) and heavy reliance on expensive external supplies of ART, for example (Jackson, 2002:71). Combined, these factors led to the deterioration of the country's medical services (see Mashamba, and Robson, 2002:275). The socio-political and economic crisis early in the 21st century, and the years 2008 and 2009 in particular, provided ammunition to publicly denounce the post-colonial government for health care failure (MSF Report, 2009:1¹⁴). The adverse impact the failing health system had on maternal health care, and everyday life across the country pushed Amnesty International, (2008) to conclude that state politics somewhat overshadowed citizens' rights given that key politicians incessantly engaged in politicking which risked the complete collapse of the country.

The fragility of the state and volatility of the situation in Zimbabwe have created a discursive platform for the Zimbabwean feminist scholar Essof, (2008:127) to pose a seemingly simple but revealing question: "how do the shocking statistics about Zimbabwean reality – the world's highest inflation rate and lowest life expectancy rate – translate when it comes to Zimbabwe's women?" In thirty-two years of democracy, the country has witnessed substantial violations of human rights. While the contextual scholarship on Zimbabwe is useful for a general understanding of the ways in which gendered identities are moulded in colonial and post-colonial settings, it does not reveal much about the situation of (elderly) women in the rural areas – the subject of this thesis – and factors that prevent them from being included within the general neo-liberal framework of the rights bearing women. I want to underscore the need to explore Zimbabwean elderly women's embodied experiences of sexuality and the politics of gender in a space rent by economic and socio-political divisions, and a context where there is one of the lowest life expectancy rates in the world.

Locating elderly women within research on gender and sexualities in Zimbabwe

¹⁴ See also AP/Los Angeles Times, 2/17/2009; Amnesty International, 21 November 2008

Before I introduce material on elderly women, or even locate them within the literature that I have reviewed, it is pertinent to situate my theorisations in feminist writings that have framed “women’s bodies” as a theoretical tool of analysis (see Thomas, 2003:3). The symbolic construction of women’s bodies (see Arnfred, 2004:62) supports the theory at the heart of this thesis that, it is through embodied experiences that people interpret the world around them. Informed by these feminist ideas along with those of Foucault who explicitly conceptualises “the body as an ascribed surface of events from which prints of history can be read” (Rabinow, 1984:83), this research re-values women’s bodies as a route to re-imagining a nation. Aside from feminist theorisations, my epistemological position places emphasis on the complex interplay between individuals and broader economic and socio-political structures (see Giddens, 1984), which requires that I analyse how people often navigate their way through shifting social landscapes (Miller, 2000:75). I take women’s bodies into my frame of theorisation as I endeavour to illuminate the process of nation-building in Zimbabwe by paying particular attention to elderly women’s embodied experiences of gender and sexuality.

Why ageing women’s bodies?

To the best of my knowledge, how sexuality is experienced as a woman’s body transitions and matures through various stages of life is rarely explored by Zimbabwean feminist researchers, including those whose work I have reviewed in this chapter. I am at this point compelled to reveal that ‘empirical findings from South Africa underscore the dearth of literature about older women and sexuality’ (Orner, 2007:173). This thesis draws on the way age shapes sexuality (Vance, 1984:17) and sexuality emerges as a deep-seated part of everyday life right into old age. Central focus is on representations of what elderly women’s experiences of gender and sexuality have been throughout their lifetime. The strategy of locating representations of women’s bodies and sexuality within an age-based framework is fundamental for “it permits a re-insertion of the category of old age into a theoretical framework which queries the contexts of ageing within everyday life experiences” (Degnen, 2007:71). The process entails tracking down visible and invisible forces that were at play throughout a woman’s lifetime, which have created a discursive platform for analysing how sexuality as a discourse changes over time and how sub-discourses spring from the dominant one.

An analysis of socio-political trajectories reveals that “persons living in a swiftly altering world [...] find that each stage of growing older is a matter of arriving at something quite different from what it was for the age group just before” (Moore, 1978:23). Zimbabwe’s shifting ideological and structural frameworks in the wake of HIV/AIDS have created a space where elderly women have to constantly navigate contested landscapes and try to understand the weakening norms and values that have traditionally guided and shaped the politics of gender and sexuality in the country. The image becomes that of a disrupted way of life across generations as elderly women negotiate and make sense of emerging sexualities in contemporary Zimbabwe. It is against this backdrop that I draw on elderly women’s representations of their embodied experiences of gender and sexuality, which have not been explored over many decades. I draw upon their expertise as ‘historians’ as a way of ‘understanding’ change in Zimbabwe based on my assertion that their stories offer a particularly interesting review of ‘what has happened’ to an embodied Zimbabwe. Engaging with a category of people who have been overlooked in gender and sexuality debates allows me to explore the entwined questions of gender, sexuality and political change in Zimbabwe. Approaching sexuality from this perspective interrogates elderly women’s experiences and responses to shared norms or belief systems, and examines their individual reactions to socio-political and economic shifts.

The process of listening to elderly women’s experiences of gender and sexuality requires delicate handling because it involves the examination of how individuals negotiated their sexuality within complex socio-political and economic spaces. Studying experiences of sexuality is complex because “issues of sexuality have been considered too private and not a public matter to be discussed” (Silberschmidt, 2004:233). Despite this restraint, together with the widespread negative depiction of post-menopausal women’s sexuality (Huffstetler, 2006:4), I perceive elderly women as vital people within gender and sexuality debates and constructions, especially given that most contemporary research relegates women to the categories of girlhood, adolescence or motherhood. Analysing the representation of experiences lived as a ‘life’ could significantly contribute to better theorisations of sexuality within shifting contexts, and deeper understanding of the implications of such on women.

Central research question

The research questions framing this thesis were not developed independent of ideas that emerged from scholarship committed to nation/sexuality discourses in Zimbabwe, Africa and beyond. I narrowed my interest in the literature to form the central research question below, which seeks to examine representations of gender, sexuality and political change in Zimbabwe:

What discourses can be illuminated through elderly women's representation of their gendered and sexual lives, and how do these discourses renew engagement with notions of Zimbabwe as a 'nation'?

Exploring women's representations of experiences lived as a 'life' requires mapping the meanings of the shifts from girlhood to womanhood, to motherhood and wifedom right into 'old age'. Similar to Thomas (2003), who profiles the colonial and post-colonial story of Kenya as a nation through notions of body knowledge, fertility, ageing and the state, I engage with elderly women's narratives of sexuality and the changing socio-cultural and political terrains in Zimbabwe. The meanings attached to questions about gendered and sexual experiences tell a deeper story about the changing socio-political space which elderly women have experienced throughout their lives – a process which theoretically redefines who and what contemporary Zimbabwe is.

Chapter Conclusion

A detailed engagement with the literature in this chapter has helped me explore questions of gender and sexuality and how these have intersected with nationalisms in various colonial milieus. Tracking the literature on nation-building activities at independence and in subsequent years was both instructive and central to a contextualised analysis of sexuality discourses in Zimbabwe. I reviewed literature that I elicited from relevant academic texts and electronic journals which exposed gendered nationalisms in the colonial era, and the profound shifts in the 'states of the nation' from 1980 to the complex contemporary Zimbabwe. As I mapped the body of literature, I followed how the country's independence and subsequent events paradoxically led to the deprivation of rudimentary human rights, and how this subtly informed scholarly debates on gendered bodies and sexuality in Zimbabwe. A

significant amount of literature reviewed in this chapter has provided a rich resource for exploring the enmeshment between sexuality and socio-political discourses in Zimbabwe.

Literature review has also endowed me with deeper theoretical and conceptual insights which enable me to frame the central research question that I explore in my engagement with the phenomena in question. Analysing existing literature has enlarged the historical knowledge base from where I theorise and illuminate the intersections of body politics and 'states of the nation' at various times and contexts. The next chapter is about my theorisation of methodology and the actual fieldwork with which I engaged in order to navigate gendered nationalisms.

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Chapter 4: Epistemological and Methodological trajectories

The purpose of the chapter is to map what the construction of a research design for this thesis entailed. Central focus is on the selection of feminist epistemological and methodological frameworks, methods of data collection and analysis, sampling procedures, research setting and ethical issues that I took into account prior to and during fieldwork. The discussion argues that these fundamental research decisions were not made independent of the central research question, conceptual frameworks, my positionality (Mbilinyi, 1992:35; Naples, 2003:3) and/or identity as an aspiring feminist researcher in Gender studies. The chapter looks at hypothetical aspects of the research before moving into a more ‘empirically-focused way’ of engaging with epistemologies and methodologies. This structure enables one to arrive at a meaningful synthesis of the theoretical and practical aspects of this research, which encompasses a reflective discussion about how I made sense of fieldwork realities, and includes the limitations that I encountered throughout the research process. The last section of the chapter outlines the framework for listening to elderly women’s voices as captured in the transcript narratives, and how to engage with such in the following analytic chapters.

Researching through feminist lenses

The literature on feminist theorisation with ‘Africa’, which I explored in Chapter 2, is central to how I approach questions of gender and sexuality methodologically. The process responds to key methodological questions that interrogate what feminist research is through a critical mapping of literature that elicits the complexities of ‘doing’ feminist research. The literature points out how oppositional binaries that stem from epistemological debates within feminist thought locate researchers who adopt feminist conceptual and methodological approaches that often construct and applaud an essentialist image of African women (see Kolawole, 2004:253) on one hand. African feminists, on the other hand, are researchers located in diverse academic disciplines, who deploy research methodologies that take questions of gender research and analysis in Africa seriously. The central objective here is not to rehearse feminist ideological polarities or how different feminisms have evolved over the years: – that is from ‘first wave/pre-modern feminism through second wave/modernist feminism to third wave/constructivist/post-structuralist feminism’ (Baxter, 2003:4). I am especially drawn to

the work of African feminist researchers who are often guided by questions around “how to imagine a “field” (in an African context!)” (Bennett, 2008:5).

As African-feminists establish epistemological and methodological voices, they draw on the basic tenets of feminist theory to guide the way they construct and represent what they perceive as knowledge (see Tamale, 2011:25; Meena, 1992:3). The work of Mohanty helps one understand how African and other ‘Third World’ feminists respond to Western liberal feminism. For instance, Mohanty argues that African and ‘Third World’ feminists build on liberal feminism’s idea of liberation to chart their own freedom, thereby rejecting the particular materialist and political concerns of liberal feminists (see Mohanty, 2003). In following feminist research principles, they challenge the positivist ownership of what comprises ‘true’ or ‘relevant’ knowledge (Mbilinyi, 1992:52; Meena, 1992:4). Mbilinyi (1992) draws on Harding (1987) to underscore how traditional epistemologies have marginalised women from research circles. For instance, the conventional research designs constructed science as men’s domain where women were neither visible nor audible as “knowers or agents of knowledge”, and the image of ‘the researcher’ as exclusively ‘male’ (Mbilinyi, 1992:32). Tamale (2011:14) also points at how epistemological and methodological frameworks from a colonial past have contributed to the construction of a researcher/researched dichotomy. Deeply embedded in a traditional and hierarchised power structure is the assumption that the researchers are ‘the knowers’ and the research participants are ‘naive subjects’ (ibid; Blackwood 1995:55).

Feminist theory is one of the methodologies celebrated for challenging and transforming conventional research designs (Tamale, 2011:14) that previously excluded women and silenced their voices within research spaces. African feminists design methodologies that question for instance “the legitimacy of the knowledge that has been constructed about African sexualities” (ibid). Empirical findings that emerge from these methodological struggles on the continent are often represented through non-stereotypic/non-essentialist lenses by many African feminist icons but principally ‘Awe, Imam, McFadden, Mama, Mbilinyi, Meena, Mhone, Tsikata, Sow and Steady’ (Bennett, 2008:5). The image becomes that of African feminists designing research frameworks that strategically locate them in spaces from where they resist diverse notions of domination. As such, African feminist researchers construct and espouse methodological frameworks that communicate with the

worlds that feminists strive to transform (ibid) – an approach that has to be shaped by African women’s lived experiences (Tamale, 2011:4).

African-focused researchers draw on key feminist guiding principles which “respect experience and differences” (Hartsock, 1981 cited in Hekman, 1997:343) such that women’s diverse voices and experiences emerge as a feminist research priority. Many feminist researchers have embraced an experience-oriented methodology through the use of life histories (Mbilinyi, 1992:65). These life histories create a discursive platform from where women represent their personal trajectories and perceptions (ibid). African feminist researchers also adopt research designs that take the researcher’s positionality into the central frame of their methodological theorisation (Naples, 2003), an approach that rejects positivist constructions of ‘unbiased knowledge’. Positionality, also referred to as ‘self-reflexivity’, is about the ‘ideological, material social location and the personal identity of the researcher’ (Mbilinyi, 1992:35&49). By taking into account the researcher’s positionality, the researcher’s personal experiences constitute an integral part of the research design and the research data that is to be analysed (Mohlakoana, 2008; Matebeni, 2008; Mupotsa, and Mhishi, 2008; Bennett, 2008; Undie, 2007). Thus the presentation of the elderly women’s voices in this thesis does not necessarily mean that an ‘untainted’ account is being produced. My mere presence in the ‘field’ influenced what was revealed by the elderly women as evidenced by my findings¹⁵.

Embracing a feminist-qualitative research framework

Qualitative methodology is defined as “research that produces descriptive data: people’s own written or spoken words and observable behaviour” (Taylor, and Bogdan, 1984:5). Guided by the above mentioned feminist research principles, I adopted qualitative methods of capturing social relations and interactions that are seldom found in quantitative studies, which often generate data for statistical analysis. The aim here is not to demean the significance of quantitative research methodologies, but instead to break away from earlier research on ageing that predominantly adopted a quantitative approach with a policy orientation (Arber, 1995 cited in Onyx, Leonard, and Reed, 1999:8). My methodological choices are grounded on the observation that

¹⁵ See ‘Reflections on my positionality’ in this Chapter, ‘Embodiment: reconstruction of womanhood’ in Chapter 7, and the limitations of the study in Chapter 9.

when we study people qualitatively, we get to know them personally and get close to what they experience in their daily struggles in society...we learn about concepts such as beauty, pain, faith, suffering, frustration, and love whose essence is lost through other research approaches (Taylor, and Bogdan, 1984:7).

Thus, I opted for qualitative research methodologies because they can locate the researcher in the social setting where interaction happens, a situation which offers deeper insight into complex realities (see Neuman, 1997; Denzin, 1997; Dooley, 1995) that is beyond mere statistical generalisations (Cameron, 2001:14). I also developed this section bearing in mind methodological complexities of engaging in gender and sexuality research (Bennett, 2008:5). These are challenges attributed to the way in which research into sexuality is often inhibited by the embarrassment and discomfort of the participants and that of the researcher (Kelley, and Byrne, 1992: xiii cited in Frith, 2000:281). The design and the process of research using a qualitative feminist research methodology became less of a challenge because I learnt a great deal about data collection and analytic techniques from fellow African researchers who have conducted equally sensitive research into sexuality (Tamale, 2005; Gune, and Manuel, 2011; Tamale, 2011). I drew on the work of Tamale (2005:13) who when researching sexuality among the Baganda women of Uganda adopted feminist research methodologies which allowed her to “foreground the sexual experiences of participants, as well as the meanings and interpretations that they attach[ed] to those experiences.” I adopted the feminist standpoint which pays attention to “the experience of women” and the problematic of “theorising differences” (Hekman, 1997:344) in order to carefully listen to elderly women’s experiences of gender and sexuality throughout their lifespan. By foregrounding the voices of these elderly women, I allowed the women in question to contribute to the analysis of their own situation rather than merely imposing a particular framework derived from an external view of their situation.

The place of ‘life experiences’ in feminist methodologies

Fully aware of the various techniques that researchers could deploy when collecting qualitative data in accordance with feminist theory (Mbilinyi, 1992:32; Naples, 2003; Harding, 1987), I selected a biographical approach as the main research method. The biographical approach is the most appropriate way of approaching a lifetime’s experiences

because it allows women the opportunity to represent personal trajectories and interpretations (Mbilinyi, 1992:65) of other phenomena that they see as shaping their lives. Furthermore, the merits of the biographical approach are embedded in the realisation that qualitative data can take a story format and can also be gathered in that format (Punch, 2005:217). Ngaiza and Koda (1991) however reveal that life histories generate biographical data that is often taken for granted by mainstream research for being “too personal, too specific and atypical” (Mbilinyi, 1992:66). That notwithstanding, feminist research methodologies respect every woman’s story or experience, and interrogates those aspects of life that are usually trivialised or pushed to the peripheries of research. ‘People’s talk’ within such research designs is perceived as a rich source of information that illustrates different facets of their lived realities (Cameron 2001:1) and storytelling emerges as a fundamental and viable method of data collection (Punch, 2005:217). ‘Talk’ adopted here as the principle research method doubles as a meaning-making tool for interpreting the complex realities of everyday life.

When narratives are constructed as a way of relaying one’s subjective life history/story (Polkinghorne, 1995), the analysis of the narratives within feminist research becomes a method for exploring how ‘structure’ is enmeshed with ‘agency’ (Schoepf 2004:123). Feminist researchers through examination of the narratives of lived experiences capture the ideological and structural contours that women have had to navigate. Narrating one’s biography becomes a way of relaying how one either negotiated the constraints or capitalised on the opportunities presented to them in the past (Miller, 2000:75; Schoepf, 2004). Life stories or biographies are of great significance to this study because they allow me to pay attention to structural shifts and “the passage of time” in biographical narratives (Miller, 2000:76). The biographical narratives also enable the researcher to follow how individual identities and those of nations are re/shaped as they change in response to shifting circumstances (ibid: 159). Thus, all biographical interviews in this research recognise the radical change to Zimbabwe’s economic and socio-political terrains over the past decades. Listening to biographical stories created discursive spaces for re-valuing representations of women’s bodies and their lived experiences of gender and sexuality through which I could re-imagine Zimbabwean history.

The meaning of ‘elderly’ in Zimbabwe

While the central objective (to engage with elderly women's representations of their sexual and gendered lives) has been unambiguous throughout the preceding chapters, I have purposefully avoided defining the term 'elderly'. The conceptual difficulties that many social scientists engaged in ageing research have had as they try to set the boundaries and limits of those who they could consider as aged (Degnen, 2007:70), is the reason why I have delayed providing my own definition. Researching the meaning of ageing in Zimbabwe – a country that has recorded the lowest life expectancy in the world, which dropped to 34¹⁶ years for women around 2008 (Essof, 2008:127) due to a multiplicity of factors including the AIDS epidemic (MSF Report, 2009:2) – has meant that I have had problems in setting up my research design. The situation has left me with no option other than to ask this key question: “Is chronological age a clearer indicator of the difference in categories of old age (“over 85 years of age”, “under 75”) or is physical ability (“disabled”, “frail”) a more reliable frame of reference?” (Degnen, 2007:70). My response to this methodological question draws on scholarship that has exposed how definitions of old age are framed relative to prevailing circumstances in any given context. Such include the theorisation that,

Whether we wish to define 'elderly' as a non-active person who has attained retirement age will depend upon the economic and social organisation of that society [...] besides the mere accumulation of lived years (Rwezaura, 1989:6)

Taking into account the inference that “many Zimbabweans less than 60 years already looked physically old” as a result of the socio-political and economic changes (Ramji, 1990:46), the term 'elderly' in this research refers to women born in or before 1950. These are women, whom I believe have either experienced or witnessed many years of very intense and dramatic socio-economic and political shifts in Zimbabwe.

Sampling procedures

As the sub-theme 'Reflections on my positionality' reveals, the decision to engage with Shona speaking elderly women of Ward 17, Zaka District, Masvingo Province, South-East of Zimbabwe, emerged out of a personal drive to gain insights into meanings and representations of gender and sexuality within my own culture. Apart from my 'subjective

¹⁶Men's life expectancy is estimated at 37 years (WHO, 2006).

positionality', the idea flowed from academic reflections on research that has been conducted around the life worlds of women situated in rural spaces. The literature points out that "the few studies that have been conducted in Southern Africa tend to be concerned mainly with the urban elderly living in institutions" (Ramji, 1990:45). Those that have focused on the elderly located in rural areas deal with issues of HIV/AIDS, orphaned children and the increased burden of care. I therefore designed this study in such a way that I could engage with the realities of living through a gendered body in rural Zimbabwe, and explore the ways in which representations of women's experiences of gender and sexuality have been enmeshed in socio-political structures.

I used purposive, selective or target sampling, a process whereby researchers consciously choose a research setting and respondents who are perceived to be rich sources of information about the subject under study (Mbilinyi, 1992:60; Miller, 2000:78), to interview nineteen elderly women aged 59⁺ years at the time I did the fieldwork (in 2009). As I observed earlier, I theorise that elderly women are vital people with special knowledge about Zimbabwe's history, which they either rehearse or re-imagine through their embodied experiences of gender and sexuality. I strongly believe that elderly women in rural Zimbabwe, whose lives stretch back to the colonial era (around 1950) and the Chimurenga War of 1966-1979, are rich resources that tell the story of what the nation has gone through in the past decades.

As I had adopted relatively lengthy life stories (Miller, 2000:80) as the central data collection method for my research, I opted for a small sample of participants because it creates the necessary space for delicately probing the study of more complex aspects of life (Strauss 1987). Working with nineteen respondents allowed me to gather "sufficient data to undergo in-depth analysis without the research becoming unmanageable, prohibitively time-consuming or less-focused" (Westerlund, 1992:182). When the data is 'lived experience', a small sample allows every respondent ample time to relay the story of her life from her own viewpoint for purposes of discourse analysis (Cameron, 2001:14).

Fieldwork realities

This is a section that reflects on the circumstances under which I captured the experiences of nineteen elderly women in Zaka District. The section discusses my fieldwork trajectories

(including the technicalities) under different sub-themes which expose how methodological and theoretical propositions turned into fieldwork realities. Personhood according to Stanley and Wise (1993:161) “cannot be left behind and out of the research process, and failure to discuss something which has been present within the research itself, is an omission.” Therefore the discussion captures how my subjective positionalities influenced the way I negotiated entrée and sought the elderly women’s consent, and how we subsequently co-created complex meanings and knowledge(s) between October 2009 and March 2010.

Navigating the research contours

Charting my PhD journey hypothetically, I thought that the six months long fieldwork trip would begin with “an exploratory, pilot phase” which was intended to first map the research landscape (Mbilinyi, 1992:60). It was during this proposed pilot phase that I thought I would identify possible challenges, and imagine the best ways of navigating the social terrains within which sexuality boundaries are constructed, negotiated or resisted (see Jeater, 1993:2). Negotiating access into Ward 17 and locating myself at Chipanza shops, where I resided throughout fieldwork – was far less complex than I had imagined. My first morning at Chipanza shops marked the beginning of rigorous but productive fieldwork engagements. On this particular morning, I woke up to realise that residents of Ward 17 were gathered at Chipanza shops for deliberations on how agricultural inputs from Agro-Seed¹⁷ were to be distributed in preparation for the new farming season. My host family urged me to ‘invade’ this meeting as a way of negotiating entrée, which I did. Without undermining the authority of Zaka Rural District officials, Ward 17 herdsmen and Agro-Seed representatives, I introduced myself and briefed these officials about my intentions to conduct research in the community. Even though permission to interfere with the proceedings of this meeting was granted unconditionally, it is vital to note how fieldwork realities manifested from this point forward.

The methodological framework that I had hypothetically projected during the early stages of my research was now put to the test. I had, for instance, proposed that a herdsman would help

¹⁷A donor-affiliated company that gives rural communities farming inputs on condition that they shift from ox-drawn ploughs towards “*diga-udye*” – literary meaning ‘*dig and eat*’ – whereby people use hoes to dig holes in which they sow different donated seeds. Due to the labour-intensive nature of “*diga-udye*”, people have renamed it “*diga-ufe*” meaning ‘*dig and die*’.

me identify and establish rapport with a woman through whom I would gain access to other elderly women. In practice, it was Mr Mombeyarara, a teacher at a local school, who introduced me to the residents of Ward 17 on the instructions of the authorities. Since he did not know me personally, Mr Mombeyarara identified me with my parents, who were primary schools teachers in Masvingo province for more than three decades,

Eh, this Mr and Mrs Mugumo's daughter, she is based in South Africa where she is studying women related issues, and as part of her studies, she is here to...she would like to learn more about growing up as a girl from 'her grandmothers'...So 'grandmothers', feel free to have a word with her during break time or after the meeting, and see how best you could assist your granddaughter (Fieldwork notes, October, 2009).

This introduction and the brief statement about my research opened 'avenues' which took me into elderly women's social worlds where I could engage with their experience of everyday life. When the opportunity to 'privately' converse with the women arose, I could tell from their initial questions that my presence reconnected them to a past that they shared with my parents. The caucus meeting with the elderly women created a perfect platform for me to explicitly disclose my interest in their experiences of gender and sexuality. Disclosing my research focus was significant since I needed to remove any doubts or fears about what participation would entail (see Miller, 2000:82). The elderly women showed remarkable interest to the extent that some even wanted to share their trajectories on the spot but the circumstances were not conducive at that time. In order not to lose their willingness to participate, I went through women's biographical data to justify why I was only interested in those aged 59⁺ years. Stipulating a specific age made the selection procedures and the setting-up of the initial appointments with a considerable number of women far less complex. It is incredible to re-imagine how a meeting I attended by coincidence turned out to be a conducive space for my first interaction with elderly women and guaranteed my entrée into their worlds.

Even though my identity as a 'Mugumo' enhanced rapport, issues of entrée required constant interaction with the community at large. Inspired by Degnen (2007) who had adopted data collection methods that situated her in the everyday world, I found myself taking part in diverse activities as a way of negotiating further access into women's social spaces.

Attending activities such as ‘*mukwerere*’ (rain making ceremony¹⁸) and church services, and engaging in ‘small talk’ with women who came to Chipanza shops – to purchase groceries, access the grinding mill, board buses or fetch water from the borehole – offered me many opportunities to set and confirm interview schedules. Chipanza shops proved to be a strategic methodological location from where I interacted with women from all parts of Ward 17, including women who did not attend the Agro-Seed meeting.

Biographical interviewing processes

The selection of life stories as the prime data collection technique meant that interviewing processes in no way followed a written script. I made use of unstructured, open-ended and in-depth interviews to capture the elderly women’s representations of their experiences of gender and sexuality. During the interviews, the elderly women provided in-depth representations of both personal experiences and those based on observations. In view of the lengthy nature of open-ended biographical interviewing (Miller, 2000:80), in-depth interview sessions with each woman lasted a whole day with some breaks, and there were several follow-up sessions in the course of the fieldwork. Nevertheless, fieldwork was never intended to be a ‘lifetime’ activity. I had to find a balance between fieldwork realities, my personal life, and above all, the university academic calendar.

Integrating and balancing a relation between different research methods (Bennett, 2008:5), I opted for interviewing techniques that helped me grapple with the lengthy process of listening to life stories. Audio-recording, in contrast to note-taking, proved to be a powerful means of capturing life stories because it significantly reduced the number of interview hours per session. With the consent of interviewees, I recorded all the interview sessions for later analysis otherwise, note-taking could have “imposed an analytical structure on the information” and reduce the life stories to a mere summary (Miller, 2000:88). Since I did not have to write down everything the respondents said, audio-recording afforded me time to frame what I perceived to be coherent and ethically sound questions. Although audio-recording helped me remain focused, I wrote down all responses that warranted further probing. Note-taking was also vital for updating my journal of the daily encounters and observations that I used when I reflected on the entire fieldwork journey months later.

¹⁸An activity in which community members brew beer and gather on a hilltop close to the herdsman’s home where they sing and dance to appease their ancestors who, in return, would make the rain fall.

Exploring the respondents' life worlds meant that biographical interviews had to be conducted while the elderly women carried on their everyday tasks whenever possible. For instance, most elderly women told their stories at home whilst cooking, roasting nuts, doing their laundry or shelling round nuts. Although the idea was not to disrupt interviewees' daily routines, women involved in labour-intensive activities such as 'winter ploughing'¹⁹ and the 'rain making ceremony' had to take a break from these activities in order to share their stories. Several interviews were also conducted at Chipanza shops where some respondents stopped over for some drinks after church or sat on the verandas of the shops to avoid the scorching summer heat before heading home around sunset. Finding a convenient venue for listening and recording the interview sessions was part of my fieldwork preparations but in reality, I found myself listening to elderly women's stories from different venues. The constant shifting of venues meant that I had to cope with different disruptive sounds either from the grinding mill, 'mukwerere' songs, interviewees' family members and even livestock. These were however minor hindrances because being part of elderly women's 'everyday' life was a well thought-out methodological objective.

In grounding the research within a biographical or experiential methodological framework, I managed to enter into the elderly women's social worlds where I captured quite adequately the individual interpretations of the complex but fundamental forces that have, and continue to shape women's sexualities in Zimbabwe.

Observing 'the everyday'

Data collection according to Ulin, Robinson and Tolley (2005:72) "does not begin and end with an interview." Although the bulk of the data was gathered as biographical stories, the traditional method of direct observation was an integral research technique throughout fieldwork. Direct observation often capitalises on the way non-verbal cues convey deep-seated meanings, thought processes and feelings expressed as people engage in discussions (Heslop, 2002:49). As I took note of non-verbal cues that could not be recorded (Miller, 2000:91), I also made use of positive body movement like nodding my head whilst the elderly women shared their experiences to keep the interview space engaging and lively. The

¹⁹Usually done in the dry winter season so that the early summer rains could penetrate more easily but this time, it was done well into spring in compliance with "*diga-udye*" standards.

strategy of capitalising on both listening and observation skills (see Heslop, 2002:49) allowed me to observe the elderly women as they talked about everyday matters with unexpected visitors who ‘disrupted’ the interview sessions. Discourses that emerged from these conversations speak volumes about the volatility of the research setting, including the complexities of ageing in Zimbabwe²⁰.

Framing listening as a research imperative (Heslop, 2002:49) made a lot of methodological sense because the elderly women conveyed their stories through what Miller (2000:74) terms “cross-referentiality.” This allows for recollection “as the respondent moves back and forth in their life story and makes linkages between different types of events and segments of their life” (ibid: 74; see also Jaworski, and Coupland, 2006:25). Cross-referentiality meant that I had to allocate every individual sufficient time to share their experiences and re-organise their thoughts, without interjecting or pushing my own views. Direct observation in combination with excellent listening skills enabled me to closely follow the women’s biographical stories capturing past and present experiences of gender and sexuality that I consider essential to the process of re-seeing Zimbabwe through embodied experiences.

Ethical Considerations

This section discusses key ethical issues that surfaced before and during fieldwork, and questions about how I set to engage as ethically as possible with the data from the elderly women’s individual experiences through the course of this thesis. The major ethical issues include the need to “protect, respect and be accountable to” the people involved in the research processes (Bennett, 2008:5; Clark, and Sharf, 2007:400). Covert research can

²⁰*Mbuya Mhiri: Welcome.*

Visitor: Ah, don’t stress, I am empty-handed...I brought you nothing...Let us just have fun!

Mbuya Mhiri: Ah, sure let us have fun...we shall die! Did you get the seed aid?

Visitor: No, I was not given...some of us just walked for nothing.

Mbuya Mhiri: Why do they do that? They did not register even a single member of your family?

Visitor: I was registered and it was even indicated that so and so would share with me, but today, that person refused to share. Once the person who has a coupon receives his/her share, he/she becomes so violent. So do you expect me to be violent as well...on what grounds? But why do people do that when it comes to aid! Why do people argue over these things that are meant to be free of charge? Poor me...there is absolutely nothing for me...I will just wait patiently, maybe they will give me, I don’t know. Are we not disturbing those who are studying with our lamentations?

Mbuya Mhiri: Ah, that is what she is studying, she has learnt as well...about the trouble that you go through in this community...trying to get aid, yes free of charge things. Could you please talk to me my grandchild, let us proceed otherwise you won’t be able to handle this poverty discussion at all. (Fieldwork Notes: October, 2009).

jeopardise the good will of interviewees on whom current and future researchers are dependent (Taylor, and Bogdan, 1984:28). Any research involving human beings must observe such fundamentals of research ethics as gaining informed consent and voluntary agreement to participate. The process of negotiating access into the fieldwork setting placed the onus on me not to damage the reputation of Gender Studies. I therefore disclosed my research interests and procedures in detail to local authorities and elderly women (as mentioned earlier). Fully alert to the drawbacks that could emerge if an interviewee quit before the completion of the research (Miller, 2000:82), I explained the anticipated duration of fieldwork, the frequency of interview sessions and how likely these were to disrupt their daily routines. Elderly women who were convinced that I was an undercover agent simply there to register people for humanitarian aid were excluded. The fact that I eliminated them does not imply that I was in any way insensitive to complex existential battles that elderly women have fought all their lives.

While mainstream research philosophy perceives “emotional involvement, the presence of emotions [as] taboo” (Stanley, and Wise, 1993:160), I resisted such an ideological stricture throughout my fieldwork. I was influenced by the fact that qualitative researchers often deal with private aspects of an individual’s life which call for “sensitive and respectful responses” (Konza, 2005:15). I distanced myself from “enthusiastic life history researchers” who according to Miller (2000:81) uncritically uphold assumptions about the therapeutic potential of sharing one’s own experiences. I offered emotional support to the elderly women who broke-down as they reflected on excruciating past experiences which were often linked to Zimbabwe’s shifting socio-economic and political landscapes. I realised that relaying experiences from a biographical position “is an exercise in introspection” (ibid) especially because those who tell personal stories tack back and forth across different contextual spaces.

Exploring ‘nationhood’ discourses through representations of women’s bodies and sexuality demanded insights into complex social realities which could potentially complicate fieldwork. I took great care to ask ethically sound questions because I understood “the personal is intimately political” (McFadden, 1992:162). I methodically phrased ‘simple’ questions about ‘growing up’ such as “What was so good about school?” (Wilton, 1998 cited in Miller, 2000:90) so as to allow interviewees to first provide demographic information linked to their childhood experiences. And again drawing from Miller (2000:82), I gradually shifted the questions to probe more personal aspects of sexuality, which I introduced by

asking about the meaning of menstrual blood for example. Thereafter, I asked more intimate questions about their experiences of the body as sexual and reproductive, norms governing Shona sexuality; and the politics around sexual expression. The elderly women responded to these questions with a greater degree of openness than I had anticipated.

David (1987) reveals how ethical issues go beyond avoiding the dangers of deception or the importance of free consent to encompass the repercussions that could arise from “the publication of empirical findings” (see Gune, and Manuel, 2011:38). The ethical dilemmas revolve around how the publication of biographical data makes ‘the personal’ public (Miller, 2000:82). Ethically, I felt compelled to disclose to the elderly women before starting and after completing fieldwork that I would publish their experiences in my PhD thesis. I only interviewed those women who granted me permission to draw upon their personal experiences because their stories could possibly benefit future generations by promoting the study of sexuality. When I reviewed the work of Undie (2007:2) who, akin to Mohlakoana (2008:75), pursues the complexities of publishing “elderly women’s youthful experiences considering their present-day respectability and positions in the church”, I was confronted by a new aspect of research ethics. The realisation that I could retain a degree of privacy by tweaking details that were marginal to the study (Atkinson, 1998 cited in Miller, 2000:83) somewhat liberated me from this disconcerting dilemma. I adopted pseudonyms in place of all elderly women’s real names to maintain anonymity. The big question for a researcher who has ‘worked at home’ remains: “Which and how much data can one use and still remain ‘loyal’ to a context which one is a part?” (Undie, 2007:2; see also Tamale, 2005) even though I publish all life stories under the shield of pseudonyms.

Reflections on my positionality

Researching sexuality in Zaka District where I received my primary and secondary socialisation meant that I did not have to learn much about the research setting, let alone the local language (ChiShona), which I speak fluently with a Karanga accent. Drawing on my identity as a Zimbabwean and my previous research experience in rural and farm communities across the country, I embarked on my fieldwork journey aware of local conventions of ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ dress. ‘Unacceptable’ are clothes deemed to be ‘suggestive’, and often the construction of such in rural areas is along promiscuity lines.

Because I was exploring sexuality discourses in a social space characterised by explicit gendered definitions of physical appearance, including the way one dressed, I had to carefully select the clothes²¹ that I wore throughout the period of fieldwork. Any departure from respectable attire could have possibly shifted the community's gaze so as to question my moral standing, and plunge me into deep body naming politics which would ruin my fieldwork and research plans.

Enthused by the framing of the feminist standpoint as “an interested position interpreted as bias” (Hartsock, 2004:285), I was tempted to begin the research journey within my own family. I was convinced that the life stories of my 67 year old mother (now 71) were potential sources of data. Listening to her stories could have been a great opportunity for me to hear her representations of Shona sexualities, something she had ‘evaded’ when I was young. On the other hand, the need to balance objectivity and emotional involvement so as to avoid the risk of producing an autobiography due to personal intrusion (Miller, 2000) compelled me to leave my mother out of this research. When I got to Zaka to begin fieldwork, I was to some extent viewed with a sceptical eye as an outsider even though most of the people of Ward 17 recognised my parents when I mentioned their names. The sense of not belonging engrossed my mind and I constantly found myself re-negotiating ‘my insider identity’ in order to bridge my disconnection from a community I once lived in. In between telling their stories the elderly women however, asked me questions about the past which recalled my parents and their humanitarian activities in the community. While peripheral to my research, incidents such as the 1992 drought somehow reconnected me with the interviewees and the community through a shared past.

The generation gap between the respondents and me was a source of contention in most academic spaces where I shared my PhD endeavour to research sexuality among the elderly. For instance, the imagination of a ‘young’ woman questioning her elders about their most private experiences posed feasibility challenges. These reservations were entrenched in methodological complexities around how I intended to earn the trust of elderly women so as to ensure that they would talk freely about the ‘tabooed’ subject. But being a Shona woman, I knew that it is culturally acceptable for elderly women to coach young women on diverse

²¹I avoided mini-skirts, shorts and trousers

aspects of sexuality²². Consequently, the elderly women considered me a perfect candidate for coaching based on my multiple positionalities as a relatively young Shona woman, who had never married and was without any children, who is located beyond Zimbabwean borders far away from possible coaching. Because of the effects of urbanisation and rapid modernisation on traditional knowledge and practices (Mashamba, and Robson, 2002:275), these elderly women seldom find young women who are willing to be coached. They grabbed the offer to assume their neglected role without hesitation. They bragged about having ‘superior’ knowledge of Shona culture²³ and spoke boldly in their capacity as sexuality experts²⁴, based on lived experiences. Allowing all the interviewees to occupy ‘the coach/expert’ position worked well methodologically for it enabled me to debunk the hierarchical researcher/researched divide which is detrimental to the co-creation of knowledge(s). I also ceased to be regarded as ‘an intellectual from UCT/South Africa’ and fully embraced my ‘insider’ identity as a ‘young Zimbabwean Shona woman’ who earnestly wanted to learn from her elders. The elderly women’s life stories ceased to be “an invasion of privacy” (Miller, 2000:81) and became a way of preparing a ‘young’ Shona woman for marriage. Beyond serving as a vital methodological technique, the ‘coach/trainee’ relationship reveals discourses of disconnection between ‘old and young women’ in contemporary Zimbabwe which are analysed in Chapter 7. While it is true that the elderly women are ‘coaches/experts’, it is not possible to present them as coaches throughout the thesis. It is therefore evident that as much as I want to interrogate the researcher/researched binary, the binary reasserts itself when I refer to the elderly women as interviewees, participants or respondents in this thesis.

As much as this research was principally a requirement for a PhD, it created a great opportunity for me to undergo sexuality-related coaching that I had involuntarily missed during girlhood. Since I identify myself as “an insider [who] look[ed] at her own culture

²² Traditionally, as Shona girls transitioned into womanhood, they received training on how to make sense of a changing body at puberty, including the meaning attached to menstrual blood. They were coached on how to live through a transitioned body such that puberty was a time when the body and the social person were subjected to profound surveillance directed by cultural norms which regulated female sexuality. Coaching also included training on how to elongate the labia in preparation for marriage.

²³ “Come spread your mat right here my grandchild so that I can teach you...that is what I enjoy...giving my grandchildren some advice. Ah, that is what I am capable of doing...yes please!” (Interview with Mbuya Mhiri: October, 2009).

²⁴ “Oh, I was a champion! I knew everything about these herbs” (Interview with Mbuya Mataka: October, 2009)

through feminist lenses” (Tsanga, 2011:57), fieldwork emerged as an informative²⁵ and reflective exercise in self-discovery. The process exposed gaps in my knowledge and inadequacies of my assumptions about Shona sexualities prior to beginning this PhD journey. I was able to move into discursive spaces from which I could critically explore the notion of nationhood in Zimbabwe through representations of women’s experiences of gender and sexuality.

The complexities of ‘researching at home’²⁶

A ‘sanitised’ account of my research experience would not offer a clear representation of the obscured fieldwork contours that I navigated. My presence in a space where pen and paper had become synonymous to registering for aid posed a huge ethical conundrum (as previously alluded to). A significant number of people who had a glimpse of the research process became very inquisitive and asked questions such as “*What is this one writing? Is she writing down our names? Whatever it is, could I please join in?*”²⁷ These questions point to the politics of survival, and also suggest that community members did not overlook any opportunity to get aid. Faced with the challenge of being mistaken for an aid agent, I found myself having to justify my presence in Ward 17 after the Agro-Seed meeting where I was initially introduced. Insistence on being registered for aid, together with interviewees’ age came to define those whom I would select or reject as a participant. While the final nineteen interviewees did not state their interest in being registered for hand-outs up-front, they posed questions about the future of the country’s economy – questions which illustrate how anxious the community was for answers that I did not have.

The challenge of recording women’s voices in Zimbabwe where audio-taping is often associated with hidden political agendas, which are driven largely by local and international media, revolved around issues of trust. Even though I commenced fieldwork towards the end of 2009, virtually a year after the violent 2008 presidential election, there was an isolated incident where I found myself re-negotiating access after an interviewee’s husband

²⁵ “*Sure, you have learnt a lot my grandchild! If you are wise you keep this advice because there is nowhere you will get it in life*” (Interview with Mbuya Mhiri: October, 2009).

²⁶ Mkhwanazi, (2005) cited in Gune, and Manuel, (2011:38).

²⁷ Interruptions during an interview with Mbuya Mhiri (October, 2009)

interrupted the interview demanding to know my political standing²⁸. The ‘interrogatory’ disruption points to the constant fear of persecution that emerged from being associated with strangers whose political standing was suspect. It also serves as subtle confirmation of the unsettled state of the nation barely a year after Government of National Unity was formed. Apart from that, the incident hints at how instrumental my identity as ‘my mother and father’s daughter’ (see Undie, 2007) was as a method for negotiating and re-negotiating entrée and gaining trust throughout fieldwork.

As I listened to the recorded interviews and reflected on some remarks that I had noted in my journal, I gathered that my personhood within ‘everyday’ fieldwork spaces was under constant scrutiny. I reasoned that ‘surveillance’ of the way I interacted or conducted myself during fieldwork was guided by an implicit code of conduct of what was/is culturally appropriate. In the few instances where I crossed cultural boundaries and declined food offers, for example, my actions were misread as a subtle affirmation of status/class differences so much so that I felt ‘othered’ by some of the remarks²⁹. In addition, the ‘coach/mentee’ approach to sexuality research had methodological implications on my personhood. My physical appearance particularly my face, breasts, buttocks, hairstyle, ornaments and clothes were used in figurative and performative depictions of ‘real’ womanhood and sexuality. Consequently, interviewees interrogated visible and invisible aspects of my sexuality, as authorities, presumably without a premeditated aim to create an intimidating hierarchical relationship.

Getting to the elderly women’s homes, which were dispersed across Ward 17, and far from the public transport (which was not operating at that time) meant walking several kilometres through thick summer forests. The thought of the looming torrential rain season – which meant the interviewees would need to excuse themselves from the research project so that they could spend more time ploughing – and a fixed academic timetable with a deadline

²⁸“Grandfather: Eh...I just wanted to get to know you better. I do not know, eh, where do you stand? [KB: Where do I stand...as in?] I mean as a visitor whom we have just met, where do you ‘work’? [KB: I am not working grandfather, I am Mr and Mrs Mugumo’s daughter and I am here to learn from my grandmothers on issues related to growing up as a woman.] Oh really, from Murembwa? I think I saw you at the township when we had a meeting and you talked to some women, yes...I remember. You are more than welcome my grandchild, feel free to go ahead and do your research. (Fieldwork notes: November, 2009).

²⁹“Maybe you are used to good food...maybe your grandfather slaughtered a goat for you so you had a good meal with proper relish?” (Interview with Mbuya Ndari: November, 2009).

looming, inculcated a spirit of endurance in me. I persevered regardless of the ‘volatile’ research landscape, and fieldwork became an invaluable part of my PhD journey.

Developing an analytic framework

The objective of this research is not simply the narration of the elderly women’s diverse voices or experiences. Rather, it is viewing their stories as a way of re-imagining Zimbabwean history. The need to theorise and construct knowledge(s) of the way gender, sexuality and nationhood discourses intersect meant establishing an analytic framework with which to engage the elderly women’s subjective experiences. I developed an analytic framework which, through representations of women’s bodies, reflects the socio-political changes and the controversies that have made Zimbabwe the nation it is today. Just as there are many methods of data collection used in qualitative research, so data analysis also has different meanings and interpretations (Punch, 2005:193). This “richness and complexity” of qualitative research has produced a pool of data analysis frameworks upon which different researchers could draw (ibid: 194). The selection of data analysis methods is however subject to the researcher’s epistemological position (Naples, 2003:3).

Being a feminist researcher who works with ‘talk’ as a way of generating knowledge(s), I drew on feminist principles of exploring qualitative data in developing an analytic framework that would permit a gendered discourse analysis of the transcript narratives. The analysis of data from a gender perspective often entails engagement with ways in which gender relations are played out within economic and socio-political institutions (Mbilinyi, 1992:34). It is vital to note that the analytic framework as guided by constructions of feminism is not simply a rehashing of how subjugated women are, but it is “a mode of analysis and a method of approaching life and politics” (Hartsock, 1981:35 cited in Hekman, 1997:343). The framework also embraces discourse analysis because of “its explanatory and critical depth” (Jaworski, and Coupland, 2006:31). Attempts to define discourse analysis illustrate that

[It] is not a unified body of theory, method and practice. Rather, it is conducted within various disciplines, with different research traditions, and with no overarching unifying theory common to all types; being heterogeneous, it is difficult to define (Gee et al., 1992 cited in Punch, 2005:221).

While discourse has its origins in Linguistics, where it has been defined “as language in use” (Jaworski, and Coupland, 2006:5), many theorists have re-conceptualised it to suit their discipline-specific interests. The process has exposed discourse analysis to critical debate which has broadened its application beyond the spoken word. Central to this analytic framework is Foucault’s work on discourse “as a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (see Hall, 2001:72). Foucault’s theory of discourse interrogates what constitutes knowledge within a specific context and era, its construction and how it is passed on to the next generation, its meanings for constituting subjects as well as the influence it has on the shape of the society (see Jäger, and Maier, 2009:34). Foucault’s notions of discourse have inspired several theorists including Wodak, and Meyer, (2009); de Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg, (2006); Jaworski, and Coupland, (2006); Cameron, (2001); Levett, Kotler, Burman and Parker, (1997); and Fairclough, (1989), some of whom have critiqued Foucault and in doing so have developed discourse as a theory, a method and a tool of analysis.

Why Discourse Analysis?

Foucault’s (1978; translated in 1990:11) theory which depicts ‘discourse as a flow of knowledge over a historical period’ is a powerful analytic tool for exploring ‘how sex has been put into discourse’ and how through language sexuality has acquired meaning through language over the years. Here discourse analysis is deployed as a meaning-making device for interpreting qualitative data collected as life stories, which has allowed for a historical approach to sexuality research as interviewees drew on their lived experiences. Historically rooted experiences have been defined within discourse analysis as “discursive events” (see Jäger, and Maier, 2009:46), which provide ‘discursive contexts’ crucial for analysing social phenomena like sexuality that do not exist outside history (Hall, 2001). Equally important is the interplay between discourses (Baxter, 2003:8). Discourse analysis from this viewpoint includes an examination of the intersection between a topic and different sub-topics, or rather, how one topic interrelates with other topics through a process referred to as the “entanglements of discourse strands” (Jäger, and Maier, 2009:47). The analysis of how sexuality as the central discourse interlocks with other sub/discourses creates and broadens

the ‘discursive context’ in or from where I critically approach questions of gender, sexuality and shifting socio-political landscapes in Zimbabwe.

Implicit in Foucault’s theorisation is the correlation between knowledge and power, especially “how knowledge is put to work through discursive practices in specific institutional settings to regulate the conduct of others” (Hall, 2001:75). Discourse analysis from the power/knowledge perspective allows me to engage with the social construction of hegemonic notions of sexuality, and how these are reinforced by interlocking systems of stratification. Thus the analytic framework explores counter-hegemonic discourses that emerge as women defy long established value systems which dictate proper and sanctioned ways of interacting in specific situations (Jaworski, and Coupland, 2006:6). Discourse analysis emerges as a tool for dismantling existing knowledge systems while, at the same time, exposing the interplay between power and ideology (Punch, 2005:224). Consequently, Foucault’s work on “discourse, power and knowledge, and the question of the subject” (Hall, 2001:72) has become a way of constructing and illustrating that which comes to be interpreted as social reality.

In view of the assertion that “when [...] social scientists analyse spoken discourse, their aim is to make explicit what normally gets taken for granted” (Cameron, 2001:7), the following analytic chapters take the meaning of working with qualitative data generated through ‘talk’ seriously. The chapters are predominantly about ‘hearing voices’ in qualitative material, that is, the analysis of data captured as interviewees responded to the questions that I asked on gender, sexuality and socio-political change. Although the literature points out how hierarchised voices are within storytelling (see Punch, 2005:218), I follow feminist principles that research and represent experiences from an interviewee’s perspective to illustrate how knowledge is co-created by the researcher and those with whom the researcher works (Manning, and Cullum-Swan, 1994 cited in Punch, 2005:217). The analytic framework is structured in a way that “reflects the viewpoint of the individuals directly involved in the phenomena being studied with no attempt to alter any interviewee’s view of reality” (Konza, 2005:20). In this thesis, discourse analysis of the interview’s narratives works as ‘a say’, that is with what elderly women say only – at least to start with – arranging the text into ‘discourses’ or pools of significance. I use interview data verbatim drawing it out into themes that reflect the dimensions of the research questions, but do not necessarily produce a summary of the ideas.

As much as I respect the celebration of difference within feminist research, I am aware of the fact that individuals are guided by shared societal norms and values which interpret and represent social reality. Hence the claim, “We speak with the voices of our communities” (Lemke, 1995 cited in Cameron, 2001:15). In analysing the elderly women’s stories, I move beyond individuality to identify ‘common threads’ that ‘weave’ together interviewees’ diverse accounts and experiences of gender and sexuality. This analytic approach allows me to pay serious attention to recurring themes, similarities, tensions and contradictions in the interviewees’ representations of gender and sexuality. Since discourse analysis is “not exclusively concerned with spoken discourse” (Cameron, 2001:7) the analytic framework also permits the analysis of the non-verbal aspects of an interaction – that is data gathered through direct observation of the elderly women as they engaged in different activities and dealt with the changing circumstances of daily life.

Working across languages

Data analysis began with a cumbersome process of transferring audio recordings into an easily comprehensible transcript format. The fact that I recorded all the life stories in my native language, ChiShona, meant that I had to translate the transcript narratives into English. Finding English equivalents of the proverbs, idioms and metaphors the elderly women used to represent aspects of sexuality that they could not openly convey proved to be a huge challenge. I resorted to direct translations, footnoting all descriptions of complex expressions, an approach that is within the scope of discourse analysis, which incorporates the use of “description and interpretation of meaning-making...in specific situations” (Jaworski, and Coupland, 2006:6). Although metaphors and idioms do not warrant a separate analytic chapter in this thesis, they define the “discursive limits” of sexuality as a subject of research, and simultaneously point to questions about what is “sayable” and what is not within a specific context (Jäger, and Maier, 2009:36&47). That notwithstanding, similar to the deployment of metaphors among the Baganda of Uganda as “useful conceptual tools for analysing sexuality” (Tamale 2005:12) metaphors and idioms in this research have emerged as an instrumental tool for representing gendered identities and sexualities. Thus the thesis reinforces the function of metaphors and idioms as meaning-making devices that unearth deep-rooted constructions and representations of sexualities.

Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I traced the epistemological and methodological constructions of the thesis. The chapter has discussed the conceptual aspects and practical realities of engaging in feminist research. The central discussion encompassed the selection of data collection and data analysis methods, identifying a 'field' and research participants, dealing with ethical issues, and questions of my positionality, and how power dynamics were played out during the co-creation of the subjectivities of women's sexualities. Beyond these methodological underpinnings lie a chronological engagement with the elderly women's diverse stories of growing up and ageing in Zimbabwe. The age of the women, who were treated as 'elderly' (59⁺ years old – at the time I did the fieldwork in 2009), forms the basis for methodical data analysis which is undergirded by the understanding that there is a connection between the stages of life, and the elderly women's experiences of gender, sexuality and political change. Therefore the following thematic chapters analyse representations of how the elderly women experienced their bodies at girlhood, womanhood, motherhood and in old age. When 'stitched' together and analysed chronologically, these elderly women's life stories become a way of re-seeing Zimbabwe through discourses of sexuality and gendered nationhood.

Chapter 5: Growing up as a girl

This chapter analyses how the elderly women discursively construct experiences of growing up as a Shona girl in rural Zimbabwe. The chapter adopts girlhood as an analytic lens through which elderly women represent their experiences. In tracing the lives of these elderly women, I can neither escape from their family backgrounds nor their educational trajectories as these have had a great influence on how they perceive and construct sexuality. This analysis also takes account of the strategies the interviewees employed as they negotiated the gendered discourses of femininity (and the constructions of masculinity) that shaped their girlhood trajectories. For this thesis to be able to re-imagine the history of Zimbabwe through the ‘simple (life) stories’ that these elderly women told in response to direct questions about girlhood, the chapter draws upon a theory of ‘the female body as analytic’ (Thomas, 2003:3). This theorisation holds the thesis together, and it only becomes clear in the subsequent analytic chapter where the transcript narratives mirror who Zimbabwe was, principally through reflections on motherhood and nursing experiences.

Guided by a chronological and thematic approach, the chapter first of all explores girls’ educational trajectories, and this is followed by an analysis of how these girls navigated or interrupted gendered relational hierarchies at puberty. The last section pays attention to the girls’ gradual transition to womanhood as articulated mainly through discourses of preparing them to be heterosexually attractive beings, and the subsequent politics of body access and surveillance. In all, the analytic gaze of this chapter is set on the elderly women’s diverse experiences which expose the interplay between sexuality and gendered social structures through self-reflexive stories about what growing up as a girl in rural Zimbabwe entailed.

‘Mapping’ her educational trajectories

As the women relate the ‘simple stories’ of who they were and what they went through during girlhood or adolescence, they deploy education as a dominant discourse and powerful analytic lens through which they read and discursively represent the meaning(s) they attach to the education of girls in Rhodesia. In ‘mapping her educational trajectories’, an interviewee traces how girlhood experiences within the education space were shaped by broader social

structures, predominantly the structural and invisible gendered barriers that girls either negotiated or resisted as they grew up.

Responding to questions on access to education, the elderly women discursively frame their meanings of education in terms of its absence or presence, that is, whether they attended school or not; the nature of the education they received and the challenges they encountered as they negotiated the educational space within colonial structures. With the exception of Mbuya Nguvo, Mbuya Ndari and Mbuya Tamba, who exercised their agency within formal education spaces and went as far as Standard 6, thirteen of nineteen interviewees derive their definition of education from its partial presence, meaning that they had a relatively brief period at school. As such, these thirteen women only acquired basic formal education in Standard 1, 2 or 3. One of the three remaining women who did not go to school, Mbuya Vatsa, poses this rhetorical question, “*Do you think we used to go to school during our times?*” As she reviews her memories, she maps the schools that existed ‘during her time’,

There was Charingeno school, and which one else...? Oh, and Bota school. I remember there was another school...yes, Mudavanhu! That one was a little bit closer to our home, but just like Mushungwa, it was built well after my school going age.

This recollection elicits structural and developmental factors that deterred Mbuya Vatsa from attending school at that time. Among the interviewees who had a relatively brief period of attending school, the educational trajectories go beyond infrastructural factors to illustrate ideological aspects of education. Unlike Mbuya Nzimbe, who merely says “*I went to school when I was old enough*”, Mbuya Dzachi explores what it meant to be ‘old enough for school’, long ago. Her analysis critically assesses the requirements for enrolment in Sub A, and concludes that age alone was not the ultimate determinant. School-going age was defined and measured in terms of height, and if a person was ‘still young’ – below a certain height (not specified) – he/she was not allowed to start school regardless of his/her age. The measure of height thus differentiated between prospective and actual students, and what this meant for Mbuya Dzachi was that she enrolled in Sub A at the age of seven. She also derives meaning from the formal education structure, which set boundaries of where one could be as they climbed the educational ladder. However, her language subtly suggests that on completion of one’s studies, career choices were limited,

We went to school, and during that time, there were no Grades that we have now. There was Sub A and Sub B, then Standard 1, 2, 3, after that one would do Standard 4 and 5 and then proceed to the Mission [school] for Standard 6. It was only after completing Standard 6 that one either became a teacher or nurse.

The diversity of expressions used to represent how women navigated through the different Standards is remarkable. Mbuya Mhiri defines the education structure in line with her geographical location at Morgenster Mission after she had been adopted by white missionaries. Distinguishing between the forms of education accessed through her grandparents, back in the village, and that received at Morgenster Mission, she describes the former as “*small school*” and the latter as “*schooling*.” Likewise, Mbuya Shava defines her education as minimal, “*I did not go that far*.” In contrast to these implicit representations, Mbuya Bvura and Mbuya Mere speak of their education in terms of ‘how far they went’ in primary school,

Mbuya Bvura: I only went as far as Sub B

Mbuya Mere: There was Sub A and Sub B, but I didn't complete any of those.

The women who told of ‘on or little’ education make use of a financial discourse. These educational trajectories reflect how parents failed to overcome the financial barrier that deterred them from educating their daughters. The assertion “*there was no money, my parents were very poor and they never worked*” shows the influence of the financial discourse in Mbuya Rava’s representation of her educational trajectory. Mbuya Nzimbe also recalls her decision to drop out of school after Standard 2 (when she felt that she was not intelligent) as a strategy employed to save the little money her parents had. Although Mbuya Mere said “*funds were very limited...so little*”, her narrative goes beyond describing the financial constraints her family encountered. The use of pronoun ‘they’ in her utterance “*in addition, they also expected us to bring some books for writing*” problematises how school authorities structured the education system then. She deconstructs the expectation that students buy school stationery themselves against a background of very limited funds. She found this regulation a huge obstacle since it pushed her out of school. The financial discourse is evocative of the socio-economic organisation of society at that time. This is how Mbuya Shava sums up what life was like when she was a girl,

As you know...life was very difficult long ago.

These educational trajectories depict the financial constraints that families wrestled with, then. Mbuya Tamba and Mbuya Ndari, on the other hand, draw the meaning of education from their fathers' privileged position in society. As daughters of a teacher and a businessman, respectively, these two women took advantage of growing up in a stable financial environment and pursued their educational aspirations up to Standard 6, as was mentioned earlier. Mbuya Ndari reveals the material and financial advantages she enjoyed at home or in her family,

I believe that life was far much better when I was still growing up because we were brought up in a privileged family. My parents had businesses, so we didn't grow up in need. We literally had all we desired, be it food...we had the pleasure to eat whatever we wanted...Be it clothes or going to school...we were sent to school until some of us said enough.

The interplay between gender and financial discourses presents a different prism for discursively analysing interviewees' girlhood experiences. Mbuya Mushandira expresses her interpretations of her limited education as a gendered financial discourse. She uses a comparatively gender-conscious language "*personally, I believe my father had no money because even my brothers did not go to school.*" Of particular interest is the absence of a mother figure in those girlhood stories of schooling that are entrenched within the financial discourse. All nineteen elderly women use phrases "*my parents*" and "*my father*", but where there is mention of a mother figure, interviewees like Mbuya Mushandira swiftly single out the father figure to discuss the financial constraints, "*born of very poor parents...my father had no money to educate me and my siblings.*" Mbuya Shava's representation of "*not going that far with education*" again reveals how gendered the financial discourse was. She correlates her limited education to her father's career predicament, "*my father retired early from work so there was no money for school fees.*" Mbuya Shava and Mbuya Mushandira are fully aware that their fathers failed to educate them, but they relay their stories without any attempt to deconstruct the father figure. Instead, they empathise with their fathers' financial situation. Given that there is seldom mention of mothers in relation to the battle to find money for school fees, fathers emerge as the dominant figures – a position that reinforces the hegemonic discourses of gendered economic power within the family.

Girlhood experiences illuminate how ‘a gendered first born position’ within families translated into the lack of an education for daughters. Identifying with this gendered position, Mbuya Mushandira had no option but to stay at home where she helped her parents work in the fields. Mbuya Dzachi’s girlhood experience creates a scenario where her limited education could be discursively analysed through the gendered roles and responsibilities of a mother, together with those attached to the position of first born. Her narrative, below, constructs these gendered roles and responsibilities as subtle patriarchal barriers that traditionally deterred girls from attending school. The first born daughter had to give up any chance of an education because she had to ‘help out’ at home,

I am the first-born in my family, and because of this position I failed to proceed with my schooling. I ended up doing Standard 3 only, unlike my younger siblings because there was no-one left at home when my mother, who was pregnant with our last-born, had a caesarean section. I dropped out of school so that I could take care of my young brothers and the entire home. I had to be responsible as the first-born.

The lack of education is also represented through the discursive construction of femininities within families and society at large – a process bedevilled with gendered stereotypes as Mbuya Vatsa experienced. The decision not to educate her was predominantly guided by gendered notions of physical strength because her parents believed girls to be of weaker sex compared to boys. She reports, “*My parents thought it was better for boys to go to school arguing that they could walk all those kilometres. Yes, my parents believed that boys were stronger than girls.*” The distance between home and school, which meant a lot of walking for children, points to infrastructural barriers that deterred parents from educating their daughters. The above stereotype depicts the interplay between gender and micro/macro social structures which have shaped Mbuya Vatsa’s interpretation of the education discourse.

Mbuya Zvitura also attests to the gendered stereotypes and perceptions commonly held by traditional families, which prevented her from getting an education, “*long ago, eh, they used to say that we do not send girls to school because they are prostitutes...we only send boys.*” This comment suggests that Mbuya Zvitura had to deal with the demeaning labels that her family attached to a young girl before she became sexually active. As she revisits the injustices of childhood, it becomes apparent that her current situation is discussed in the light

of past experiences which translated into limited opportunities later in life, compared to her brothers, *“boys are the ones who went to school...yes, the men in our family are very educated...some are now teachers, but as for me, no...I never went to school.”* Mbuya Zvitura views her current battle as resulting from the gendered disparities, to deconstruct the father figure for offering unequal educational opportunities to his children,

Any surviving father who did not send their daughters to school, regrets big time, wishing, if only he had educated all his children...yes, I am telling you.

To put everything into perspective, Mbuya Tugu draws upon her profound knowledge of Shona culture, and from this position she recalls that traditional societies did not expect a daughter to be educated. The ultimate objective, in cases where daughters were sent to school, was not that of creating an economically independent being because a daughter was withdrawn from school *“as soon as she could read and write...yes, that is what they valued.”* Mbuya Bvura identifies with the latter practice because her family limited her schooling to allowing her to just master basic literacy. Highlighting that they took her out of school after Sub B, she relays, *“I can only read those letters that are written the ‘traditional way’ and also in Shona...yes.”* For the same reason, Mbuya Tugu infers that parents preferred sending their daughters to school for a very short period of time, and most daughters were only sent to Sub A or Sub B, *“Anyone who went as far as Standard 1 would have greatly achieved.”* Posing the rhetorical question *“Was there any chance to get any further?”* Mbuya Bvura rules out the possibility of her moving up the education system.

The interviewees’ experiences illustrate the intersection of various social institutions that are meant to shape everyday life. The interplay between gendered financial discourses and the marriage institution shaped Mbuya Zvitura’s educational trajectory, *“My parents believed that girls make other families rich upon marriage (mupfumbidzakumwe), whereas boys look after the family. So boys are the ones who went to school in our family.”* Likewise, Mbuya Bvura reveals that her family trivialised the education of girls based on the argument that *“Boys are capable of establishing and sustaining families”* by contributing towards the family income. Mbuya Tugu concludes that parents constructed and mapped a girl’s educational path to parallel her becoming a woman. The theory that a girl should get married before she

became a 'tsikombi'³⁰ suggests that the expectation of marriage overshadowed educational priorities within families. Faced with these hegemonic discourses around marriage, Mbuya Nguvo dropped out of school at the age of sixteen, to honour her father-in-law's request that before he died he should pay *lobola* on behalf of his son. Content with this decision, Mbuya Nguvo recounts her experience without any signs of regret, largely because such conformity to marriage prescriptions gratified her father-in-law and her natal family too,

I remember it was around September when my husband's father, who was bed-ridden by that time, requested his son to make formal introductions...they asked for my hand in marriage in 1958, and I was 'sent off' to join my husband. My father-in-law eventually died when I was already part of the family and he left me at home.

Emerging from interviewees' reflections on the meaning and accessibility of education is the perception that the realities of education are experienced and interpreted differently depending on different family situations. Mbuya Mataka, for instance, frames her lack of education as a childhood spent in a broken family because her parents had separated. The subsequent union between her mother and step-father required that she negotiate space within a new family where she was constantly reminded how incredibly inferior her position was. Mbuya Mataka derives her meaning of education from the real life fact of being a step-daughter – a position which won her the label of 'second class child' with few opportunities. For example, her educational needs were seen as secondary to those of her step-father's own children, who were sent to school. Family patterns and situations which took her out of school when she was in Standard 1 lead her to portray education in terms of her inability to read and write. Up to this day, she is deeply connected to that reality and her meanings of old age are wrapped up in the correlation between illiteracy and her shaking hands,

I cannot really say I know how to read or write...it is even worse because my hands are now shaking.

Mbuya Zvitura derives her understanding of the meaning of education from the injustices imposed by her family during childhood. Her imagination and interpretations of formal education emphasise one's ability to read and write. In reiterating that if she had had an

³⁰A woman who is past her adolescence and is not married.

opportunity to go to school she would be “*able to read and write whatever it is that needs to be written*”, Mbuya Zvitura expresses the high value she places on literacy. The statement “*I cannot recall the years, but maybe the history*” points to the awkward position she feels she still occupies as she even doubts her ability to recall and give an account of her own childhood experiences. Mbuya Zvitura describes her position in detail,

Honestly speaking, it is difficult for me to tell the exact year [date of marriage] for I did not go to school, otherwise I will be lying. I am sure my brothers, who can read or write, are in a better position to tell when I got married...yes they are the ones who remember that.

Mbuya Shanga, who did not go to school either, correlates formal education with the ability to commit to memory and recall personal information that involves numbers. Her interpretation of her lack of education in relation to biographical questions about age leads her to conclude that years and age are known only by those who went to school, “*I do not remember the year I was born because I didn’t go to school.*” When asked for her place of birth, Mbuya Shanga, like Mbuya Zvitura, did not struggle to name the place where she was born which leads me to conclude that these two women equate knowledge of figures (dates) with attending school. The statement “*I personally bemoan why they did not send me to school...why did they do this to me because I cannot even write my name*” appears to provide Mbuya Zvitura with ammunition to attack her family for the gender injustices of the past. In her mind, the meaning of education is derived from the injustices imposed specifically by her father during childhood.

For Mbuya Mere, the presence of a biological father does not automatically translate into access to education. She pictures her mother as an affectionate maternal figure, “*Naturally, a mother has a kind and caring heart, whereas a father would be thinking of going to the bar or dating other women.*” This statement, which denigrates and belittles the father figure and his role as head of the household, stems from the fact that her father did not prioritise taking care of the family after the death of their mother. Mbuya Mere recounts how she was raised by an aunt, and only returned to her father’s home as an adolescent in order to go to school for just a short period. To this day, Mbuya Mere believes herself to have been an orphan despite the fact that her father was still alive when she was a child. She therefore interprets education in terms of her feeling of being orphaned, “*besides, as an orphan, I just had to*

quit.” Although she can justify her lack of education because of the absence of a mother figure, in contrast, the presence of a mother figure did not mean access to education for Mbuya Mataka.

Mbuya Ngeno’s recollections of the institutions of education and the family are full of humour and affection as reflected by the way she applauds her father for sending her to a mission school. She constructs her version of ‘schooling’ beyond primary education (Standard 3), without limiting the definition of education to the school grade system. Education for her is not about completing Standard 6, rather, it is about a vital sewing skill acquired through ‘schooling’ at the mission – a skill that later shaped her life. Celebrating her experience at ‘school’ with joy and much appreciation of her father, she says,

After Standard 3, I went to Morgenster where I was taught how to use a hand sewing machine by white people. During those schooling days, we would have lessons and tests...I learnt a lot. We would produce nice yokes and full-size little dresses that were really beautiful. I later on learnt how to use my father’s foot sewing machine at home. I really give credit to my father, for he equipped me with a relevant skill that helped me a lot as I used to sew whilst at home.

Having gone up to Standard 6, Mbuya Tamba draws the meaning of education from her experience of formal education, especially the core curriculum covered. Even though there is mention of the kind of subjects that she did at school, she does not delve into the real content of all the subjects. What interests her is the absence from the curriculum of subjects like Science – in particular, the absence of sex education from the syllabus of her schooling era,

Long ago, people never used to learn a lot of stuff at school. For example, there was nothing like what you call...the one where you learn about all your...eh...where you see drawings/pictures of everything. When I went to school, there was only History, Geography, Shona, Maths and English...yes, those five only. There was no Science!

This kind of curriculum left Mbuya Tamba without a place where she could learn about sex and reproduction during her childhood, which justifies the absence of “*obscene stuff*” from her vocabulary. She tells of an incident when a girl started to menstruate at school and messed her skirt, and the perplexed classmates asked what could have happened, “*You were*

bleeding yesterday, how big is your wound?” Reflecting on the absence of talk about sex in her adolescence, Mbuya Rava reveals how shocking the news of a mother’s pregnancy was for children who had never known what transpired in the bedroom, “*even pregnancy was never talked about.*” Although Mbuya Tamba defines the absence of this kind of information as “*ignorance*”, such an experience embodies what she did and did not learn at school, for it dictated what she knew and did not know about the biology of women’s bodies at that particular age.

Without divulging much about the actual content of what she learned at school, Mbuya Ndari clearly demonstrates how the school provided an enabling environment for nurturing the students’ intellectual abilities. She recounts, “*Our teachers urged us to embrace a culture of reading which entailed wide reading, so that we could be better people in life.*” The construction of knowledge within such a formal space cannot be separated from the way the school doubles as a platform for secondary socialisation. Shortly after describing her experience at school as “*funny*”, Mbuya Ndari points out the invaluable guidance that she received there, “*our teachers taught and advised us a lot! They had strict rules about dating that discouraged us from dating...because they argued that we would lose focus.*” What all this suggests is that, as the teachers imparted knowledge, they simultaneously shaped the students’ sexuality by enforcing stringent relational boundaries. The teachers framed ‘youthful’ high school relationships as worthless and fruitless because these relationships led to poor academic record, which they saw as an impediment to a better future. The shift from a purely academic to a social narrative highlights the mediating role of the teachers, and it also represents education within formal spaces as a mechanism for tackling both intellectual and social realities.

Education for some women is juxtaposed and measured through the ‘dullness/intelligence’ dichotomy. Mbuya Mere and Mbuya Nzimbe, unlike Mbuya Pumho, who merely states that ‘she just dropped out of school’, depict how this ‘dullness/intelligence’ opposition shaped their educational trajectories. Similar to Mbuya Mere, who claims that she went to school but her “*brains were not good at all*”, Mbuya Nzimbe dropped out of school because she “*was not intelligent at all.*” One therefore wonders who set the standard and measured the intelligence of these two girls, who dropped out of school in Sub A and Standard 2 respectively. While the two girls had the freedom to drop out of school, the timing was

misguided. In my opinion, the fact that the family allowed a girl some degree of autonomy to drop out at the beginning of primary school damaged her life and career prospects.

Even though Mbuya Ndari had also decided on her own to drop out of school thinking that she was not intelligent enough, her account presents a unique family perspective on the education of girls. She reveals how she decided to drop out of school after Standard 6 and then resisted following the career path set by her father, “*my father wanted me to be a nurse, but because I was not smart I did not go for further studies, and I opted to help him out with his businesses.*” Mbuya Ndari defines and frames her meaning of education outside formal educational parameters so as to suit her own estimate of her intellectual capacity. After opting out of school, she identified entrepreneurship as her area of strength, and nurtured the necessary skill taking on some kind of ‘on the job training’ working alongside her father. It is powerful to see how she resisted being bound by gendered theorisations of education. At a relatively young age she took a decision that shaped her life because when she got married, she established her own businesses.

Apart from these highly formal definitions of education, interviewees also refer to a different kind of education, ‘community education’. It too can serve as a tool which one could deploy to analyse the meaning of education that is outside and beyond formal spaces. ‘Schooling’ for Mbuya Ngeno continued beyond Morgenster Mission as she received some ‘training’ from her father. This kind of training was embedded in the socialisation process, which not only located her as a girl but dictated how she had to embrace the meaning of being gendered as a young heterosexual Shona woman. Mbuya Ngeno elaborates part of the “*good socialisation process*” that her father took her through. She highlights that a girl was not expected to be ‘wooded out in the bushes’ by boys. Courtship was expected to be a transparent process, otherwise, Mbuya Ngeno says,

My father had a way of teaching you a lesson if you were found in the bushes. He would give you a baby to ‘breastfeed’. If you were a well-behaved child, you would breastfeed your sibling without any guilty conscience at all, but would you do it if you knew that you ‘spent the day with a boy’? You wouldn’t! No milk would come out, but it was just a practice our elders used to enforce discipline.

Although Mbuya Mhiri does not delve into the kind of ‘schooling’ she received at Morgenster Mission, her representation of education is remarkable for it shows the influence of the church in the socialisation of girls. Having unmarried white missionary women, who despised men, as her foster parents, Mbuya Mhiri internalised the Christian way of life that valued purity, and for that reason, she got married in church. She cherishes the role these women, who brought her up, played in her early life, and she recounts with pride the good advice that she received at the mission, *“I had Christian elderly women who taught me a lot, they were white...real white people.”* Similar to Mbuya Ndari, who says that the teachings were drawn from the Ten Commandments, Mbuya Shava’s childhood experience represents how education could be defined through the intersection of religion and sexuality, *“There was a lot of teaching and guidance at church...a lot of decrees such as ‘do not commit adultery and do not lust’, that I internalised.”* The presence of the word ‘teaching’ in the vocabulary of women like Mbuya Shanga, who never went to a formal school, is noteworthy. Born into a Christian family, she aligns her definition of education with the teaching and values received during childhood through church programmes,

It all started at catechism, where we had to respond to biblical questions as a way of teaching us what is expected of a Christian...we received teaching throughout catechism until one became a member of the church.

The use of the word ‘teaching’ throughout interviewees’ stories serves to deconstruct traditional interpretations of knowledge as limited to formal education or academic spaces. The definition of education within such spaces is not broad enough to encompass the diverse meanings of education that the interviewees acquired through other kinds of education, either through the family or the church. The absence of formal education should not tempt one to treat these girls as completely ignorant because they acquired knowledge through ‘community education’, as is indicated by recurring phrases like *“my mother, my parents, my aunt, my grandmother or my uncle taught me.”* This kind of ‘teaching’ revolved around contestations and battles about the meaning of being both black and a Shona woman within formal and informal education spaces. ‘Teaching’ included guidance and advice about how to behave in different spaces in order to meet the prescribed moral standards in preparation for the heterosexual role of wife, among other expectations. Community education portrays the church, the family and parents as teachers in their own right in the mid-20th century.

Navigating gendered and hierarchised spaces

The language that the elderly women use to convey their experiences throughout the transcript narratives emphasises their ideas on the construction of masculinities and femininities, and how these are used to shape and control the identities of men and women. The narratives reinforce that femininities and masculinities are discursively constructed, differentiated and affirmed from early childhood through the gendered roles that boys and girls are expected to perform. With the exception of a few women like Mbuya Ndari, who when asked about the ways in which girls and boys were socialised in her family says, “*my parents never had such mentality...they treated all of us equally regardless of sex*”, most girlhood stories represent how gendered identities and roles were discursively constructed within families. Mbuya Dzachi, for instance, elaborates how boys and girls in her family received gendered advice and teaching,

We used to perform some chores at home, such as working together in the fields, but as we grew older, there was a clear definition as to what chores were for girls and boys. Girls were taught how to perform all household duties, while boys had to herd cattle and were taught carpentry work making some wooden spoons and yokes, how to build storerooms for farm produce. They taught us all these in order to prepare us for future roles as husbands and wives.

It is clear that the construction of gendered identities is entrenched in the broader discourse of heteronormativity, as families differentiate on the basis of sex, the advice and teaching that boys and girls receive in preparation for their future gendered roles and positions within and beyond the home. Informed by discourses around the construction of gendered labour roles, Mbuya Nguvo portrays how society through the family gradually nurtures girls into more responsible individuals within the confines of the home, while boys are out there (in the grasslands) exploring. She points out how the boys in her family herded cattle, while the girls worked closely with their parents, performing chores such as cooking, and washing, as well as plastering mud walls and cow-dung floors. From the gendered distribution of chores above, it is evident that girls internalised responsibility for a multiplicity of tasks which also guaranteed that traditional families had someone who could take care of a home, both inside and outside as Mbuya Mushandira’s experience shows,

My grandmother argued that a daughter doesn't just sleep! She taught us to wake up early in the morning and do the dishes, sweep the yard, harness cattle and till the land using an ox-drawn plough. We also used to pound and grind grains such as sorghum after supper...yes.

The interviewees suggest that the family introduced not only strict surveillance over the deployment of these roles, but there was also some room for negotiation, especially in regard to girls' labour. In spite of clear cut gendered identities and roles within traditional families, girls could sometimes perform chores that were often defined as masculine. The concept of a 'masculine woman' is generated by the representation of interviewees' roles beyond the home. Mbuya Nzimbe and Mbuya Shava describe how they performed masculine chores such as harnessing cattle and tilling the land using ox-drawn ploughs. After a long day in the field, the girls would also take on all the domestic chores for the entire family when they got home. Below, Mbuya Mushandira suggests that all this was done in the name of preparing a girl for future roles within her own home,

My father taught us to harness cattle because he didn't want us to leave his home one day, and become daughters-in-law who didn't know how to plough. Therefore, he was preparing us for the future.

Teaching boys feminine chores however was peripheral. Mbuya Vatsa, for example, explains how her parents ensured that her brothers just performed male-related duties such as tilling the land and herding cattle. Her brothers enjoyed the freedom to decide whether or not to assist their sisters with feminine domestic chores. Furthermore, transcript narratives reveal how culture through the family institution reinforces hegemonic discourses of masculinity as it naturally ascribes some form of power to boys within families. Being gendered as man automatically ascribed Mbuya Nzimbe's brother some power over the whole family when their father died,

My father passed on when we were still very young. Our mother was there, but our brother was like a father figure, for he eventually became the family bread winner...he assisted my mother.

The examples given above render the family an environment within which gendered hierarchies are created and perpetuated, and the alienation of the alleged physically weaker sex is reinforced. Mbuya Mere recounts how failure to execute masculine duties perfectly, brought punishment, “*it was hard, and whenever I failed to bring them [cattle] home I would be beaten thoroughly with a belt.*” Any attempts to resist having to herd cattle as a woman were equally met with resistance and further affirmation that she had to do it, “*there is no-one to herd...you are the one who herds the cattle here.*” Even though Mbuya Shava, who did not have male siblings, represents her childhood experiences of performing masculine tasks as distressing, she currently enjoys the gendered labour roles defined by her family. Mbuya Shava can speak of the positive aspects of that experience because to this day, she can perform chores that are predominantly masculine such as milking cows, harnessing cattle and using an ox-drawn plough. Similarly, Mbuya Dzachi interprets the masculine chores that she performed when she was growing up as a source of empowerment given that she attributes her current physical strength to having done such work since childhood,

I remember I had to herd some cattle and harness them to the yoke, and to this day, I can still do all that.

Gendered hierarchies are further framed within representations of women as productive and reproductive beings. For instance, Mbuya Dzachi represents her father as the typical man who was responsible for the productive activities outside the home (working in town), while her mother took care of the re/productive work at home. Likewise, the gendered position of being a ‘first born’ forced Mbuya Dzachi into working on the family farmlands, and deprived her of an education when her mother was hospitalised. At the age of eleven, Mbuya Dzachi embraced the meaning of motherhood and carried on the maternal role successfully throughout her mother’s hospitalisation,

I managed to keep an eye on everything, taking care of my siblings. I went on to plough in the fields and grew some crops, and we had food on the table for that year.

Her experience provides a discursive lens for analysing and comprehending how gender has been used to reinforce hierarchical relations between men and women in private and public spaces. Mbuya Vatsa and Mbuya Zvitura, however, challenge hegemonic ideologies and

practices for confining women to activities within the home, while men engage in more recognised work in public spaces.

Interactional norms

The transcript narratives represent the construction of femininity and masculinity through discourses on the control of behaviour, physical performance and peer relationships. Growing up as a girl meant embracing societal expectations which prescribed acceptable norms governing say, 'the proper way' of sitting. Mbuya Tamba recounts that it was traditionally mandatory for girls to sit on the floor with their legs crossed, in private and public spaces. When her construction of what is improper behaviour for girls is juxtaposed with what is acceptable behaviour for boys, it illustrates how norms governing femininity are aligned with the dominant discourse of masculinity,

Of course, a son does not stress at all...he simply walks in and sits on the bench, chair or even a rocky surface, and no-one questions his sitting position. But if it is a girl, she is reproached about where she chooses to sit and the way she sits, 'How do you sit? What are you doing in front of all these people? It is not allowed!'

Mbuya Tamba associates a woman's private organs with obscenity to stress how society perceives women's bodies as an epitome of good morality and the norms and values constructed around this embodiment are meant to control their sexuality. Mbuya Tamba provides an example of how conceptualisations of women's sexuality are informed by theories of biological difference. When she was a child, these biological and cultural explanations endowed boys with the authority to navigate and experiment with their bodies, "a boy could walk around without wearing any shorts...yes, a boy could do that!", but in contrast, "a girl could not walk around naked...no....no....no!" Her justification is embedded in the biological make-up of a female body,

A girl is not supposed to get used to the idea of constantly checking down there, it is not acceptable. Besides, our private parts as women are difficult to check...the female organ is too obscene.

These norms and values that seem so repressive also present an irony, let alone contradictions and grey areas within Shona culture. The interviewees' experiences represent how norms governing women's sexuality were re-defined and modified appropriately as girls matured and navigated the various stages of life. Age played a central role in determining and legitimising the time when girls could access their own bodies through the elongation of the labia in preparation for womanhood – a process I will deal with shortly. On further analysis, the women's experiences reveal how the same female body whose visibility in public places was so fiercely protected could be seen by boys in spaces such as the swimming pool, where it was permissible for boys and girls to swim together naked. With the exception of a few women, for example, Mbuya Shanga, who explicitly distances herself from the custom of both sexes swimming together in the nude, most interviewees reveal that swimming was one of the few moments when interaction with boys was permissible. Below are a series of responses from the discussion I had around nude swimming,

Mbuya Mhiri: Girls and boys who had reached puberty swam together in one pool, all of them naked!

Mbuya Zindoga: Yes, we grew up swimming together with boys until we developed some breasts. Boys moved around with their 'birds' [penis] exposed and we would see that so and so's 'bird' is long, but no-one ever bothered. As we dived into the water,

Girls sang: 'Heri sadza mutekwe' [as if to draw the boys' attention]

Boys responded: 'Swedera' [come closer].

Mbuya Mhiri: Yes please! Nobody stared at anybody! And for sure...it [penis] would not be erect because the boy knew that we were just playing. It was a crime if a girl reported that so and so's son touched her nipple. There wasn't any stupid behaviour or 'prostituting'.

The above excerpts present the swimming pool as a contradictory space that permits other rules of gendered behaviour to be ignored. It is portrayed as a completely safe place, but where there is stringent punishment for touching a girl's breasts, yet at the same time, adolescents could see the very private parts of the body (the penis and the clitoral hood). The interviewees agree that nudity at the swimming pool was not only culturally acceptable, but that it was 'not obscene at all.' Mbuya Bvura had a somewhat different experience at the

swimming pool. The boys wore ‘mugwada’³¹, while the girls used two pieces of cloth to cover their breasts and pubic area. The interviewees assert that in all cases, intimacy was not allowed in any way, and the girls were constantly cautioned about ‘playing with boys’³². They explain the absence of intimacy with phrases such as “*we were not sinful; we had no dirty minds or bad intentions at all; nobody would touch another person.*” Similar to nude swimming is Mbuya Dzachi’s experience of sliding, “*Yes, we went sliding together with boys, opening our legs wide apart but nothing happened. Nobody touched anybody!*” The preceding discussion provides profound insight into the degree of self-control and surveillance that girls exercised over their bodies in order to conform to Shona notions of sexual morality.

Mbuya Bvura raises a number of activities which relate to girls’ interactions with boys, and their control over their own sexuality. For example, girls and boys were granted the freedom to spend the whole day together at ‘matumbatumba’ (‘playing house’³³). Based on my knowledge of this practice, ‘matumbatumba’ was synonymous with role playing father-mother-child, but Mbuya Bvura not only dismisses notions of role playing but emphasises the absence of intimacy in these teenage hood interactions. The absence of intimacy could also be inferred from the fact that parents trusted these adolescents with their own sexuality as they allowed them the independence to travel to neighbouring villages where they played traditional games such as ‘zaba’ and ‘tsava’ throughout the night. The parents trusted their children to behave properly, that is, exercise self-control over their physical impulses, and not have sexual relations with the opposite sex during these nights. Mbuya Bvura delights in recounting,

Ah, life back in the days was exciting, I tell. We used to go to Nyakunhuwa village to play. When we were still growing up, there was a chorus which everyone sang, and I remember Mhosva used to dance tsava, the traditional dance, and everyone would cheer him up and ululate,

Hotiyo...titi...tiyo...tiyo...titi

Titi...tiyo...titi...tiyo...ti

³¹ A piece of animal skin boys/men used to cover the pubic area and buttocks.

³² Engaging sexually with boys

³³ Shortly after harvesting, girls and boys would pick some left over grains and vegetables from the field which they would then cook at *matumbatumba*.

Hotiyo...titi...hotiyo...titi...hotiyo...tititititi

Mhosva...Mhosva yelelele.

Presenting childhood activities and interactions in terms of clear cut rules that left no room for ‘playing with boys’ or ‘mischief’ translates into a complicated set of representations of gender and the sexual body. The interviewees construct and define nude swimming as normative and ‘not obscene’ through statements such as, “*we used to take off all the clothes; we swam until we got tired, but there were no cases of girls and boys who engaged sexually; yes, we would get out of the pool, get dressed and go home; it was so easy and it wasn’t obscene at all.*” While none of these elderly women alludes to the potential of intimacy at the pool, it is noteworthy how paradoxical this level of interaction was given that some girls, who also represent adolescence as an innocent phase of life, lost their virginity at puberty as discussed in the next sections.

Becoming a Shona woman

This section explores the transcript narratives about girls’ gradual transition into womanhood. As they recount their personal experiences, the interviewees engage in serious discussion about the transitioning processes through which they attached meaning to the first menstrual blood, and how they prepared themselves for marriage as attractive heterosexual beings. Their discourses also depict what it meant to live through transitioned and sexualised bodies within spaces where behaviour was subsequently monitored as they waited to be married. The following pages examine how the elderly women discursively frame the meaning of growing up as a girl around constructions of the body as reproductive, sexual and policed – themes that recurred throughout the discussion around prescribed behaviour at puberty.

Her first step into womanhood

The elderly women explain how at puberty they were socialised to take responsibility for, and to master the rules governing their changing bodies. While Mbuya Ngeno speaks about the role of her paternal aunt in giving advice about marriage and the duties of a wife, Mbuya Dzachi, Mbuya Nguvo and Mbuya Mushandira give details of how their aunts helped them deal with the politics of the adolescent body. Their first period was not a private event

because their paternal aunts together with mothers monitored each and every step into adolescence. Mbuya Dzachi conveys some idea of what this surveillance was like, when she quotes her aunts' instructions at puberty,

You should tell us as soon as you have your first period...

Of particular interest are the various customs that these girls had to follow during this stage of development. When Mbuya Mushandira reached puberty, it was the custom for a girl to take a bundle of firewood to her aunt, and as soon as she got there, she would place it behind her aunt's back and clap. Her aunt would then inform her parents that their daughter had reached puberty for it was believed that silence, not informing them, would give the parents a serious backache. For Mbuya Nguvo, the visit involved kneeling behind her aunt and covering her whole body [with a blanket], and her aunt would know that her niece 'wagara nguvo'. The phrase can be translated literally as "a girl has sat on her dress", but it is a subtle and polite way of conveying that a daughter has had her first period. Mbuya Dzachi and her sisters had a different experience,

We went to tell one of our aunts, who then put her belt across the entrance, and when our mother exited the room, she went over the belt. This process symbolised that her daughters had now reached puberty...and this excited our mother for she knew that her daughters were now women.

Despite variations in the procedures that the girls had to go through upon realising a changing body, their encounters have in common the ritual visit to an aunt. Mbuya Nguvo's narrative reveals how elders assigned meaning to the time or season during which a girl had her first period. She brought up the notion of 'mhandachirimo' – a label applied if they "sat on their dress" in summer, around September and October. She adds that it was acceptable for a girl to "sit on her dress" sometime between June and August for elders believed that,

If a girl's first period coincides with the summer season...she is so naughty and mischievous...she is so into men...she doesn't take her parents' advice at all.

When I raised the subject of 'mhandachirimo' with other interviewees, there were mixed opinions. Mbuya Zindoga completely dismisses the label as a myth. Mbuya Nguvo contends

the label based on the idea that puberty is a natural process, *“I am sure it just happens, you do not choose when”* and Mbuya Mhiri asks the rhetorical question, *“Who would you ask...God?”* Mbuya Tamba’s words show an understanding of how age naturally determines puberty, *“we had our first periods around 15 and 17 years...and some girls even got up to 20 without having their first periods.”* Mbuya Mhiri believes that ‘one would just have her periods when it was time.’ Menstrual blood, as the subtitle of this section suggests, simply marks the beginning of womanhood.

Transitioning to ‘real’ womanhood

According to the interviewees, the construction of a female figure among the Shona is entrenched in the notion of womanhood. Mbuya Mhiri stresses how physical appearance, among other factors, has been an emblem of ideal femininity such that a ‘real’ girl is identified by *“her cheek bones which are not depressed...without any contours.”* Mbuya Mhiri adds to the description of a ‘real’ girl that her breasts should be shapely *“not just flat as if she breastfed before.”* The interviewees also discursively construct the notion of womanhood beyond physical features that are open to public scrutiny. Focusing on the most private parts of the body with a high degree of openness, Mbuya Zvitura and Mbuya Mataka divulge how elongation of the labia traditionally marked ‘real’ womanhood. Mbuya Vatsa acknowledges that she received training on *“how to become a true Shona woman”*, a practice Mbuya Nguvo identifies with,

That was the next step one had to take as soon as she reached puberty...yes, as soon as she had her first period...she was expected to go to her aunt for the ‘pulling’. Yes, my aunt taught me that.

Some interviewees hold different ideas about the origins of this cultural practice. When asked about labia elongation, Mbuya Tamba associates it with Shangani people’s ‘*khomba*’ practice which sent all daughters to the river for thorough coaching in preparation for womanhood or wifehood. She however acknowledges, *“Even among us, we practised that as Shona people.”* Mbuya Rava refers to her growing up in a village near a Shangani community to show how Shangani customs influenced her transition to womanhood, *“I was brought up next to a Shangani community...so I copied them.”* Mbuya Nguvo, on the other hand, presents labia elongation as a deep-rooted Shona practice, *“Yes that was part of our tradition...that is our*

area of speciality...” Through the statement, “a woman who did not have them was not a ‘real’ woman according to our traditional belief system”, Mbuya Zvitura also embraces and frames the elongation of the labia as proudly Shona. Mbuya Mataka also provides insight into the way the elders metaphorically described and distinguished ‘real’ from ‘unreal’ Shona women,

Long ago, if your genitals looked like a baby’s mouth without teeth, elders would ask you why you didn’t elongate the labia. Elderly women used to ridicule girls who did not prepare themselves for womanhood through songs like,

Chiuno chinenge mudongo

*Mudongo muri nane mune mashawi*³⁴

Discussions on the construction of a ‘real’ Shona woman expose diverse accounts of what the process of becoming a woman entailed. Although Mbuya Mushandira simply says, “*she [grandmother] gave us something*” in her narrative of labia elongation, Mbuya Mataka and Mbuya Vatsa describe in detail what the process of preparing the ‘remedy’ for pulling the labia entailed. For these two women, the process started with the trapping of bats which were burnt later on, the ashes of which were mixed with cooking oil for lubrication during the pulling sessions. Mbuya Vatsa speaks about her use of “*certain shrubs that grow in the bush*”, but Mbuya Mataka recalls that it was general knowledge that girls from other villages had to smoke some herbs which would make the labia grow. Mbuya Nguvo, who also completely distances herself from the use of herbs, elaborates on her experience of pulling the labia,

This is something I just heard from other people because we started to pull as soon as we turned twelve...with our hands. No herb or ‘remedy’ was used...my aunt did not entertain that. So by the time I had my first period around fifteen, I was already sorted.

Mbuya Nguvo repeats local theorisations about the body that it took those with ‘a relatively good body’ a shorter time to pull the labia because their ‘young and tender’ bodies would

³⁴ Directly translated: A waist that is like a deserted home...a deserted home is even better because it has weeds

respond quickly. Mbuya Mataka locates her understanding of the process within constructions of the body as sexual,

It was easy to pull if a woman had not had sex...the labia would definitely grow.

Interviewees' representations of the transition to womanhood reveal various sources of information and advice. While Mbuya Zindoga is one of the few women who worked very closely with paternal aunts, most interviewees' experiences deconstruct the traditional role of the aunt. The structure of Mbuya Mhiri's family when she was a girl heavily influenced who became her source of advice, "I was a real orphan, so I spent most of my time with my grandmother, and she taught me many things." Mbuya Nzimbe, who relied on her mother for advice during the transition, pointedly distances her paternal aunts from her experience of pulling the labia, "none of my aunts taught me anything about growing up...but my mother did." Mbuya Tamba also frames her mother as the source of advice,

That was the advice we received as daughters from our mother...she told us to 'wake up' and we did.

The transcript narratives reveal a different but powerful source of information outside the traditional structures of the family. Mbuya Mataka credits social networks for providing some sense of sisterhood among girls as they propped each other up as they moved into womanhood. Instead of receiving the advice from her aunts, Mbuya Mataka says she learnt at the river, "We used to wake each other up and we would go to the river." In Mbuya Nzimbe's case, the advice that 'a 'real' woman should have elongated labia' came from older girls with whom she used to hang out. Mbuya Rava (as mentioned earlier) adopted and internalised some values from the Shangani 'khomba' practice. Even though she acknowledges that her mother was her primary source of advice, Mbuya Vatsa also acknowledges how social networks created by girls themselves provided a support structure during the transition,

Our mother used to 'wake me up' together with my sisters...we would go to the nearby river or bush in friendship-based groups, to sort ourselves out to become 'real' women.

Although all the personal narratives show a high degree of openness, phrases such as “*early in the morning, when it was still dark, before the father and all other people were up, before sweeping the yard*” suggest that girls were taught and instructed to internalise labia elongation as a ‘private’ early morning engagement. They elongated their labia in secluded spaces such as backyard bushes, forests and the river under the cover of darkness. Mbuya Nguvo states that the process was so discrete that even if people saw a girl walking towards the house early in the morning “*they would think she had gone to relieve herself in the bush.*” This claim makes sense because the tins containing the herbal remedies for pulling the labia were kept in the forest until the process was completed. The interviewees construct the river as a space from where elders (mothers, aunts and grandmothers) covertly checked to ensure the proper transition into womanhood. Although done clandestinely, such physical scrutiny suggests that the elongation process was marked by constant surveillance of the body because the elders had to determine the length of the labia. Mbuya Zvitura mentions that a mother would just tell her daughter to join her at the river for a bath,

She would then see if her daughter had been doing it properly, as the labia would be protruding from down there, meaning that she is now a woman. If the mother sees ‘pieces’ half the length of her index finger, she would tell her daughter to stop because the labia would be long enough.

Flowing from these transition stories is a perception of female sexuality that places emphasises on a woman’s relationship with her sexual body. During the transition phase, besides elongating their labia, young women also received a wide range of sexual advice in preparation for marriage. Mbuya Dzachi shares how her mother made deep and visible incisions on the left and right sides of her waist as she prepared her sexually for marriage. She also recounts that her aunts provided her with the ‘sexual accessories’ just before marriage, “*they bought me some bead belts because women traditionally wore ten layers of bead belts around their waists.*” According to Mbuya Dzachi, these bead belts had great sexual significance because they rubbed against a woman’s body during sexual intercourse, which enhanced her pleasure. Mbuya Mataka adds that the bead belts were believed to satisfy men sexually too,

His ‘bird’ [penis] responded when he merely touched the bead belt, and as he rolled the belt up and down a woman’s tummy he enjoyed himself.

Mbuya Vatsa and Mbuya Mushandira affirm that young women prepared themselves as attractive sexual beings in order to meet the sexual expectations that men developed through private training. Men would use metaphors such as “*an empty tin*” or “*a naked person*” to refer to the absence of elongated labia. Although the discussion above somewhat presents a complex culture where the meaning of women’s sexuality and pleasure is wrapped up in men’s sexuality and expectations, Mbuya Nguvo and Mbuya Mataka introduce the word ‘*zvibatiramboro*’ which directly translated means ‘penis-holders’. The word refers to a mutually constitutive bond between the vagina and the penis during sexual intercourse suggesting that both men and women are expected to derive pleasure from the elongated labia. The interviewees’ narratives therefore depict a strong investment in the construction of attractive heterosexual female bodies that are not in any way victims or sexual inferiors, but adequate sexual partners.

Policing the sexualised body

The discourse which relates to the elongation of the labia does not negate the fact that the society or family controlled and policed girls’ sexuality. The elderly women reflect on puberty as a time when the transitioned body and the social person were subjected to profound surveillance directed by cultural norms which regulate female sexuality. As young women, they were encouraged to think of themselves as beings that had to value their own sexualised bodily spaces in very particular ways. This period of physical change was policed through the advice of their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, fathers, uncles, and the church. Mbuya Vatsa describes the norms that young women had to negotiate at puberty as “*pretty hard*” especially for “*mischievous teenagers.*” The norms, which revolved around personal bodily surveillance, dictated that “*one should not have sex after pulling the labia at puberty.*” Instead, a ‘real’ woman was expected to wait until she got married. This discourse, in part, explains the advice that Mbuya Mere was given by her aunts that framed sex before marriage as prostitution. She quotes, “*now that you have grown up my brother’s daughter, you should behave well...do not prostitute, it is not allowed.*” Mbuya Ndari received similar advice from her mother,

She taught me to refrain from ‘sleeping’ with men, emphasising that it is neither good nor acceptable.

The general expectation discussed above is located in discourses of sexual purity, and is framed as 'being a woman of good morals and behaviour'. Mbuya Rava puts it quite simply, "*it was important for a woman to remain a virgin.*" Mbuya Mhiri extends the significance of virginity to incorporate discourses about the body as a transmitter of diseases, "*They argued that a woman should not sleep around in order to avoid contracting infections and diseases.*" It is clear that discourses of sexual purity alerted girls to the importance of jealously preserving and guarding their sexual bodies. Evidence of bodily surveillance can be seen in Mbuya Dzachi's statement, "*we were coached by our aunts, and we never used to play around with men, not even let them touch our breasts...never!*" Mbuya Zindoga describes how she policed her own body by preventing the opposite sex from fondling her breasts because she had internalised the belief that if squeezed, the shape of the breast would be destroyed long before it had developed fully. She claims, "*Our breasts were only touched and cuddled by our husbands when we got married.*" Mbuya Rava was a virgin when she got married, and so was Mbuya Mhiri who proudly divulges, "*I only got to 'know a man' [sexually] when I moved in with my husband!*" Mbuya Dzachi recounts how she too preserved her virginity at puberty,

I grew up, developed into a woman and I stayed like that...and my sister reached puberty and became a woman as well.

The policing discourse is evident in notions of virginity traditionally embedded in the symbolic tearing of the hymen. Young women were taught to internalise that a woman should tear and bleed during her first night of sexual intercourse with her husband. Re-echoing the notion that a woman "*should not know a man*" before marriage, Mbuya Mhiri reveals that if the new husband experienced 'easy' vaginal penetration, "*He would definitely say this woman 'isengende' meaning that she is a bin where all those who want to dispose of their rubbish or dirt do so.*" As such, Mbuya Nguvo, Mbuya Bvura and Mbuya Rava agree on how non-virginal tearing was symbolically represented by a blanket that had a hole cut right in the middle. The corners of this blanket were folded inward, and the blanket was packed with the 'mother's blankets.'³⁵ Cut or not the blanket was a powerful communication between the two families. For her in-laws, it conveyed messages such as "*your daughter has 'nothing', your*

³⁵ A son-in-law is expected to buy his mother-in-law some blankets as part of *lobola* payment.

daughter was 'playing around with men'...she is a 'hole'." The woman's parents interpreted the cut as "*Our daughter has a hole...someone penetrated her...she slept with men well before marriage...she is not a virgin anymore.*" If the blanket was not cut, they knew that their daughter was still 'intact' and her in-laws would sometimes pay more *lobola* in appreciation that their daughter-in-law had saved herself for marriage. Silence was equally powerful, for it could be a polite way of conveying that the woman concerned had 'known other men.'

The high value placed on sexual purity was accompanied by parents enforcing stringent rules of courtship. Mbuya Bvura's parents enforced the custom of 'breastfeeding' a baby as a check on their daughter's behaviour, "*this was done to ensure that I was still intact because if I breastfed and the baby fell sick, it implied that I was having sex.*" Although no milk would be produced, Mbuya Ngeno believes that this was a good practice because if a daughter was of good behaviour, she breastfed the baby with a clear conscience and her father could be sure that his daughter was not indulging in 'mischievous' behaviour in the bush with boys or men. Mbuya Ndari refers to the courtship advice she got from her mother, who explicitly encouraged her to have one boyfriend, "*this she said was acceptable...yes.*" Reflecting on her courtship experience, Mbuya Dzachi frames puberty as a time when she was expected to take her boyfriend to her aunt where they exchanged symbolic gifts termed '*nduma*'. The exchange of gifts, which could be dresses and handkerchiefs, marked the beginning of a serious non-sexual relationship. Nobody would date a woman or man who had already exchanged gifts. Courtship is presented here as an era of heavy surveillance, almost every step that a girl took was policed by her elders, and any deviation was punishable since it brought disgrace on the family. Mbuya Dzachi recalls her younger sister's courtship ordeal,

Her boyfriend escorted her home from church, and when she got home, my parents could not let her in, arguing that it was morally wrong and unacceptable for a woman to spend the whole day with a man and get home after sunset. My mom beat her up, and ordered her to go to her boyfriend...that is how she got married before me.

Despite her family's stringent rules on purity and courtship, Mbuya Mushandira admits without any remorse that she failed to live up to them, "*that is what I failed to stick to...I went on to 'play with my boyfriend' who eventually married me.*" Her story suggests that she resisted her parent's rigid notions of sexual control over who entered her bodily space and when, "*I just left home when I was convinced that I had found a perfect partner...yes, my age*

mate” – an assertion which challenges the norms governing women’s bodies and sexuality. This disappointed her parents, “*they were highly expectant thinking: ‘now that our daughter is mature enough, marriage negotiations will start very soon.’*” Because she had violated the rules of sexual purity, Mbuya Mushandira’s behaviour and agency were read as sheer mischief. She admits that she married ‘prematurely’ before her aunts could fully prepare her for sexual intercourse because such advice was age-based. When she got married, she had only received advice related to labia elongation and menstruation. In contrast, Mbuya Mataka lost her virginity despite her efforts to stick to societal expectations on sexual purity,

I was really a woman of good morals...yes, I had reached puberty and I was a well-behaved girl of good morals, but eventually, it just went wrong. I was impregnated by this lustful bus driver, when I used to live with my uncle. The driver developed sexual interests because I was a well-behaved girl with good morals and I was still a virgin. He used to bring me some sweets and biscuits, and as you know, ‘sweets and biscuits’ are really tasty...I gladly received and ate, until I ‘opened the small door’ [had sex] and after falling pregnant, I had nowhere to go.

Even though Mbuya Mataka finds consolation in the fact that her younger sisters had children well before she became sexually active, a close analysis of her words hints at some degree of self-blame. Mbuya Vatsa describes adolescence as a pleasurable and wonderful phase of life, while the language Mbuya Mataka uses illustrates how discourses of anger, betrayal and frustration were at play during her teens. Gendered as a woman, Mbuya Mataka had to carry the baby, deal with the rejection from both her family and the man behind the pregnancy as well as the disapproval of having an illegitimate child. Because she breached the sexual norms that bestow social respectability, the derogatory vernacular term ‘*ndakamitiswa*’, which describes how she was impregnated before marriage, suggests that she has had to live with the shame and has carried the label into old age. Her narrative hints at some degree of sexual violence and coercion as well as masculine domination, given that the bus driver was older than her, and the liaison shattered her hopes of a proper marriage. Mbuya Mataka as ‘a young virgin of good morals’ had to deal with discourses of vulnerability, deception and desertion, which expose the gendered sexual position that the majority of women occupy in society.

Chapter conclusion

The central theme that holds the preceding analysis together is the way the elderly women interpret the meaning of growing up as a girl in rural and colonial Zimbabwe. Out of ‘simple’ life stories emerged childhood trajectories that highlight the socio-political and economic context within which girls went to school. The discursive context under review is the colonial period which is spoken of as “*during that time*” or “*during those days*.” As the elderly women rehearse their girlhood experiences, they use a gendered language which speaks volumes about the invisible and visible structural barriers that were set by the colonial authorities, and that made education almost unattainable for girls in colonial Zimbabwe. The interviewees represent how the colonial government shaped the ideological and physical structures through which the educational services were provided as early as 1920, which is likely to be the year in which the eldest respondent reached school going age. The transcript narratives depict the colonial context as a space where black Zimbabweans, most of whom were located on the periphery of the job market, could not afford school fees and could not pay for school stationery. These circumstances deterred girls born into poor families from attending school. Education for the daughters of unemployed African parents was limited to attending primary school, and not being able to get beyond Standard 3.

The elderly women frame the family institution as a discursive context from where gendered hierarchies were/are constructed and reinforced. They re-echo how patriarchal families trivialised the education of girls based on the sexualised metaphor ‘*mapfumbidzakumwe*’, which reduces the benefits from investing in a girl’s education to almost nothing. As families weighed the options of educating boys rather than girls, arguments became gendered and sexualised for parents, predominantly the fathers, believed that boys unlike girls “ensure[d] the survival of the family name through bringing additional members into the family” (see Human Rights Monitor, 2001 cited in Kambarami, 2006³⁶). Further analysis of the gendered educational opportunities reveals that fathers not only relied on child labour, but they derived status and wealth from such patriarchal arrangements, to the extent that they valued girls’ labour more than their education. Writing from a feminist perspective, I ask: “Why was the same body that allegedly could not walk long distances to school, expected to perform chores framed as ‘masculine’ work within the home?” My question is directed at the various ways in

³⁶ Document does not contain page numbers

which the family institution and society control women's bodies, and enforce alienation of such in different contexts. It is however vital to recognise the "empowering consequence of physical activity that broadens women's understanding of the multiple ways, beyond appearance, in which they can physically experience themselves" (McDermott, 2000:356). The transcript narratives suggest that young women became aware that their bodies could be experienced physically as they effectively executed 'masculine' tasks at girlhood and beyond.

Over and above the image of a discriminatory education system, the women's diverse experiences point to the influence that white missionaries had on the lives of some black girls in colonial Zimbabwe. The missionaries educated some poor young black girls who had been born into religious families (see Wells, 2003:107-8). Beyond shaping their individual identities, the missionaries constructed the meaning of 'being Zimbabwean' for young women based on predetermined social and sexual mores. Thus the sexuality of these black girls was governed by religious codes of sexual purity legitimated by biblical teachings, an observation that hints at the history and impact of Christianity on the reading of sexuality. The narratives of girls who grew up away from the influence of missionaries and their schools extend the idea of education beyond formal schooling to encompass 'community education'. This was learned from their families, and it defined their gendered social positions. Girls' diverse experiences support the theorisation that,

[...] individual's [...] identities are determined by a range of 'subject positions' (ways of being) approved by their culture and made available to them by means of the particular discourses operating within a given discursive context" (Baxter, 2003:25).

As I engaged with interviewees' representations of how girls transitioned into 'real' Shona womanhood, I explored the complex dominant notions of girlhood which operated in a space heavily policed and governed by hegemonic ideologies of 'proper womanhood.' These girlhood narratives are conveyed with a high degree of openness, which somewhat debunks the long-held belief that the subject is taboo in Zimbabwe. Representations of the body as reproductive and sexual, for instance, open discussion not only about the interviewees' genitals, but their experiences with menstrual blood, which is often framed as one of the most private aspects of womanhood. Open discussion about how at puberty Shona girls were allowed to 'access' their private parts as they elongated the labia in preparation for marriage somewhat challenges depiction of the vagina as an area that girls were not to touch in any

way that is sexual (see Machera, 2004). The fact that girls prepared themselves at puberty to become equal partners in a heterosexual relationship meant that women like men could derive sexual pleasure from the elongated labia without any fear of condemnation. The appropriation of the ritual of labia elongation for sexual pleasure by pubescent Shona girls could be regarded as an 'investment' (albeit in hindsight) for sexuality in adult life. As such, 'access' to their private parts at puberty through the practice of elongating the labia did not only shape girls' identity as 'real Shona women', but it became a source of power upon marriage.

In this chapter, the transcript narratives point to tensions and contradictions which stem from the interviewees' diverse 'girlhood' experiences of how dominant discourses intersected and shaped a gendered and sexualised nationhood in colonial Zimbabwe. The tensions and contradictions, which have been dealt with under different themes, together help one to re-imagine Zimbabwean history through representations of how the politics of the body has evolved over the years.

Chapter 6: Political Shifts

This chapter presents the political shifts that elderly women experienced during the war of liberation, at independence and in the subsequent decades. The analytic approach adopted in this chapter is alert to how the interviewees assign meaning to the diverse ways in which the colonial authorities and the post-colonial government instituted and reinforced gendered disparities. Chapter emphasis is on representations of how constantly shifting ideologies and structures shaped the women's access to nationalised, politicised, sexualised and gendered bodies at independence, and in subsequent years. The first thematic section, 'politicising women's bodies', draws upon the interviewees' experiences which mirror the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe through the dominant discourses on citizenship and identity. Continuing the chronological examination of the elderly women's lives, the analytic gaze shifts to the discourses of how these girls, who are now women, experienced their bodily spaces as wives and mothers. The chapter strives to present the various trajectories of being a wife and a mother in some depth, and representations of how women's bodies double as a site of pleasure and struggle. Attention is given to the politics of family planning, the silence and tensions over children, and the experiences of motherhood that point to shifts in institutionalised antenatal care, shifts that also give the traditional nursing system a voice. The theme of the last section, 'negotiating with gendered parenthood', remaps Zimbabwe's socio-political and economic landscape through the gendered battles that women fought and won as the nation emerged from colonial rule. Overall, the chapter is really about how gendered citizens negotiated power structures that subjected them to a wide range of inequalities in both private and public domains.

Politicising women's bodies

Emerging from the interviewees' reflections on the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe are discourses about citizenship and identity. Independence is read as both inclusionary and exclusionary, for citizenship and identity in colonial Rhodesia were tied to notions of femininity and masculinity. Mbuya Tamba reveals that those gendered as women were left out of the national citizenship debates, "*There were no IDs [Identity Documents] for women long ago, but men had them.*" The possession of an ID created and reinforced gendered boundaries where the movement of 'non-citizens' (women) was heavily policed by colonial

authorities. Mbuya Shanga declares that “*the fact that we did not have IDs hindered us from travelling.*” Mbuya Mhiri quotes the language used by the colonial administrators to illustrate the influence that discourses dealing with sexuality had on policies governing women’s mobility. She reveals that ‘unaccompanied’ women who attempted to travel were interrogated by the colonial administrators who asked insulting questions, for example, “*they asked, are you a prostitute?*” Similar to Mbuya Vatsa who alleges that during the regime led by Ian Smith, women (especially those who were unmarried) had no rights to move around, let alone travel to town, Mbuya Zindoga asks,

How would you stay alone [in town]? Not during Smith’s regime...they would ask you, ‘Who are you?’ It was impossible long ago, unless you chose to go and stay with your brother...Not just going there on your own, looking for a job...How come? Even if somebody sent you some money via post [Post Office] and you didn’t have a husband, you had to go with a male relative. A woman was not even allowed to collect a dead body at the hospital, or be a witness in a court case. Their argument was ‘a woman is shit’...she was not allowed simply because of her being a woman.

The word ‘prostitution’, which recurs within the context of colonial control over women’s sexualities, has a different meaning to the term ‘obscenity’ in the women’s narratives presented in the previous chapter. This difference provides some kind of historicisation of the terms, which in a way suggests that ‘prostitution’ and ‘obscenity’ have contextual meanings that change over time. There is consensus among the respondents that the language used in interrogations by the colonial administrators had connotations of respectability and non-respectability. It is very clear that women had constantly to negotiate for space in colonial Zimbabwe because they needed men to represent them as their guardian in every aspect of life. Akin to Mbuya Zindoga, Mbuya Zvitura is of the view that ‘female citizens’, whether married or not, did not have access to amenities. Mbuya Zvitura mentions the discourse related to land acquisition when she shares her ordeal after she paid for a piece of land, “*The headman told me to come back with my husband, so that he could show us the field...we went together first thing in the morning and he showed us our small piece of land.*” The statement implies that transactions could not be concluded in the absence of a man or husband. Gender thus became a category for identifying and assigning value, and at the same time, creating and reinforcing social hierarchies between men and women in colonial Zimbabwe.

The lack of IDs deprived women of the right to travel within their own country, and beyond its borders. Mbuya Shanga shares her experience of gendered structural inequalities that governed cross-border mobility before independence, “*do you think some of us ever went to South Africa? We never set our feet there...life was not yet advanced like now.*” Besides reflecting on her five-year separation from her husband, “*Even if I missed him, did I have any option given that he had gone to South Africa where as women we were not allowed to go?*” her narrative exposes patriarchal and sexist migration rules that marginalised women’s sexual rights. Mbuya Shava agrees that women were prevented from leaving the colony, but she adds that because male-biased migration became normative, women did not think that travelling outside Zimbabwe was possible for them,

We never knew that it was possible for women to go to South [Africa]! And from observing how most men who went to work there never came back home, we were so convinced that it was too far to get there [on foot]!

There were also women, like Mbuya Vatsa, who did not let anything stop them from moving to town. Mbuya Vatsa braved the onerous regulations which governed women’s movements, and navigated her way into town as a single woman, “*When I left the village, I travelled with our neighbour Mary...there was no-one that I was related to in Harare.*” Prior to migrating to town, she suffered great psychological distress as a result of six consecutive miscarriages and the mysterious death of her only son. Her husband and his inquisitive father added to her emotional trauma. Mbuya Vatsa does not mention the lack of employment opportunities for women in town, but instead she says “*I eventually got married and ironically, I gave birth to some twins...and this time the twins survived. I ended up having eight children, five daughters and three sons.*” The statement shows that Mbuya Vatsa celebrates her decision to contravene rigid gendered boundaries.

Making sense of ideological shifts

Besides depicting the colonial construction of gendered citizenship and identity, the interviewees also hint that there were shifts in these discourses at independence. Mbuya Shanga acknowledges, “*We only got IDs when Mugabe’s government came to power.*” Mbuya Zindoga applauds the new government for redressing previous gender imbalances, “*That was a huge battle Mugabe fought...ensuring that every woman has an ID and should*

equally be a witness in court cases.” Independence is thus portrayed as a space where women voiced their demand for citizenship rights, which were eventually granted. Mbuya Rava on the other hand highlights the inadequacies of the late recognition of women as citizens through the issuance of identity documents. Drawing on the fact that she was already married when women could apply for IDs, she claims that the date of birth on her ID is wrong, “*Who knew the year that I was born? No-one! The ID lies!*” Mbuya Mere confirms that there was no official register of births prior to independence “*we never used to know about such things*”, which reveals that the registration of all births only became mandatory under the new government. Arguably, the registration process gave men and women ‘equal’ power for a spouse could not register the birth of a child without the other spouse being present,

That was impossible! I went with him and some witnesses. Otherwise, he could not get the birth certificate processed on his own.

Mbuya Tamba develops the ‘equal rights’ discourse further. She reveals that with IDs, women could engage in professional work, although their role outside the home was at first undervalued, as is evidenced by women receiving lower salaries than men. Referring to the hegemonic discourses of inherent male supremacy, Mbuya Tamba explains that the gendered disparities could have been justified by the argument that women were under the authority of men, and the men were obliged to take care of them either as wives or daughters. That she is aware of how the position of women has evolved over the years is shown by the use of a discourse of ‘equal rights’, “*We are now equal...we talk about equal rights.*” While Mbuya Zindoga simply says “*it [independence] liberated us, and now we do as we please*”, Mbuya Shava makes explicit mention of the economic autonomy that women now enjoy within and beyond the borders of Zimbabwe,

Things have changed for the better because now a woman can have her own money. Those who are able to go to South [Africa] to buy some goods in bulk for commercial purposes, do so freely and most of them are doing very well. As for elderly women like me, who cannot travel that far, we grow some vegetables for commercial purposes – something that a family could rely on for survival. There was nothing like that long ago...there is significant change; women are now self-reliant.

For Mbuya Mhiri, independence gave women the right to buy land on which they could build a house. Divorcees like Mbuya Zvitura associate independence with the freedom to flee from abusive relationships. Mbuya Mataka, who lived with her natal family after her divorce, argues that it is only fair for a woman to have her own home, rather than live under other people's authority. Her narrative "*It is different and better because I have a place of my own, where people actually know that I am in charge, and they cannot simply walk in without acknowledging me as the head of the house, even if I am a woman*" suggests that there is a degree of social recognition of 'unattached' women, who own land or a home.

Trajectories of becoming a wife

The interviewees interpret questions about how and when they got married in various ways, which are related to their circumstances at the time. For Mbuya Zvitura, questions about the date of her marriage bring back memories of her lack of education, "*it is difficult for me to tell the exact year, for I did not go to school.*" When asked about the Chimurenga War, more than half the women talk about it in relation to marriage, in particular, where they were and how far they had gone in life. For example, Mbuya Tugu says "*the war was fought when I was already married.*" Mbuya Vatsa employs the war as a discursive event for mapping her marriage trajectory, "*that one was fought well after running away from my first husband...when I had already remarried and had children from the second marriage.*" In her representation of marriage, Mbuya Bvura revisits spaces previously constructed as complex, and characterised by stringent rules about dating and intimacy, "*I was still going to school...yes, that is where we met and started our relationship, and eventually, we got married.*" Mbuya Mere's account also reveals how paradoxical the rules governing teenage activities were, given that her relationship started in an environment that was policed by strict interactional norms,

We met right here in the village, when we were playing the dumbbells...those ones from long ago. Yes...that is where we met...then I got married to your grandfather...

Mbuya Pumho describes how she got married, "*I was mature...we reached an agreement*", which rules out the possibility of an early or forced marriage. Mbuya Ndari likewise dismisses the notion of early marriage, "*I cannot say I rushed into marriage because I grew up and became a 'real' woman, and only got married right at the end of my teenage hood.*"

Mbuya Ndari and Mbuya Tamba give 1969 as their exact year of marriage. Since one was born in 1950 and the other in 1947, this suggests that maturity means they got married at the age of nineteen and of twenty-two respectively. The majority of interviewees take up the maturity discourse and show how it was shaped by the norms governing virginity. This is seen in Mbuya Rava's statement, "*I was a complete woman...a complete virgin when I got married!*" Behind Mbuya Ndari's narrative "*I just told myself that I should get married before doing 'stupid things'*" are fears of being condemned by a society that stigmatises unmarried women, who are sexually active, especially one who falls pregnant before marriage. This is the reason that Mbuya Dzachi clarifies the significance of maturity and purity, "*I was born in 1950, had my first born in March of 1976, but I was not pregnant when I joined my husband's family in 1975.*" Likewise, Mbuya Mhiri proudly shares details of her courtship and marriage,

Later on, we started dating with my one and only boyfriend...not to say he messed me up, when I was still a girl...Never! He asked for a hand in marriage, and we got married properly in church...and when I moved in with him, he found me intact!

When juxtaposed with other discourses, for example, education, and especially the lack of it, marriage is perceived as a societal expectation that one has to conform to as Mbuya Nzimbe suggests, "*The only option that I was left with was getting married, as I had absolutely nothing to do.*" Mbuya Shanga, who speaks the language of early marriage, asks, "*Do you think I got married when I was mature enough? I was very young...I had no option besides getting married as I was just home doing nothing.*" The word 'early' for respondents like Mbuya Shava, who did not go far at school, means getting married at fifteen. Closely related to the discourse of early marriage is the concept of '*kuzvarira*' – a practice where fathers pledged their daughters without the daughter's consent, usually in exchange of grain. Even though Mbuya Bvura was not pledged, she identifies with poverty-driven marriages,

There was no money for school fees or clothes, so I got married out of poverty before I was mature enough.

The interviewees also depict how women had to negotiate complex and gendered spaces by pointing out the various ways in which structural forces such as Chimurenga War disrupted the process of becoming a Shona wife. For instance, Mbuya Tamba claims that "*some of our*

children in this neighbourhood were impregnated.” While Mbuya Mataka simply says that two of her younger sisters, who were still transitioning to womanhood during the war did not enjoy their teenage years because of the ‘comrades’ (freedom fighters), Mbuya Rava reads these war-related disruptions as rape. She even introduces the discourse of undeclared paternity asserting that “*many sisters were raped and impregnated, but no man accepted responsibility.*” Of particular interest is Mbuya Tugu’s narrative of how some girls chose to drop out of school and opt for an early marriage in order to avoid being sexually abused by the comrades,

My younger sister, for example, dropped out of boarding school when the war reached its peak. Continuing was pointless because guerrillas used to force them out of mission schools as well. Most girls weighed their options and thought it was better for them to get married to men of their choice...it was actually better, so most of them married young, as they ran away from abuse during the war.

The women’s narratives about the war suggest the construction of discourses contrasting respectability and lack of respectability. Such an inference displays the tension between the representations of comrades as ruthless violent rapists, on the other hand, and on the other, as people who had respect for a married woman. Although Mbuya Mataka admits that she cooked for the comrades, the statement of one of the comrades “*let me not temper with someone else’s wife*” not only distances her from ‘entertaining’ the freedom fighters, it shows some respect. Mbuya Tamba identifies with this kind of respect. On the few occasions that she cooked for them, the comrades questioned why she supplied them with food when she was heavily pregnant. Ironically, the same comrades who had made all the women in the village to bring some food to their mountain refuge, gave her some medicine to ease pregnancy pains, and ordered her not to cook for them again. She recounts,

I then stayed at home until I gave birth just before ceasefire.

Mbuya Mere, who was not exempted from cooking, illustrates that the notion of respect was not applied universally, “*I was so pregnant when the war was fought, so I used to hide and cover myself with tree branches when I was tired of cooking or carrying the food to the mountains.*” Thus the war emerges as a complex and contradictory environment where women, including married ones, battled for respect.

Women as sexual beings

The elderly women's narratives break away from discourses of the war and independence, which are explicitly connected to nationhood debates, to share how they experienced their bodily spaces as wives. As Mbuya Mere reflects on the meaning of the payment of *lobola*, she poses a rhetorical question "*how could the body be mine when I chose to be at someone's home...the man who paid money, including cattle for lobola?*" Constructions that a woman's body was the husband's are reflected in common phrases like "*he is the one who uses it or plays with it*", and are sexual in nature. Mbuya Pumho, like Mbuya Zvitura, reveals the wifely responsibility she had to fulfil upon marriage, "*to see to it that 'daddy' was pleased whenever he called for it [sex]...to be available all the time.*" In the narrative below, Mbuya Mataka outlines the different gendered sexual positions that men and women are supposed to occupy before and after sex. The word 'grandfather' – commonly used instead of penis to avoid being explicit – shows respect.

He will tell you let's start and you will start...once it's [sex] over, you are expected to sit down and give him a round of applause and clean 'grandfather' [penis]...after that you can sleep, but if he wants it again, you do it, and you still have to clean him because that is your role.

The image is one of women being lower in the sexual hierarchy, as their role is to meet men's sexual desire. Nevertheless, the interviewees' views of themselves as sexual beings are replete with contradictions that contend stereotypical constructions of women's sexuality. Mbuya Pumho found it embarrassing to initiate sex when her husband showed no interest, but Mbuya Zvitura recounts how she did not deprive herself of sex, "*I for one initiated. Otherwise what would happen if I did not initiate?*" Remarkably she locates her reasons for lack of embarrassment in the wife's sexual role and asks, "*What did I come for? I came for my husband, so why should I be ashamed?*" Mbuya Nzimbe, likewise, dismisses the possibility of a husband accusing a woman, who initiated sex of being too forward,

Why would he say that...isn't he my husband that I will be playing with?

Central to these questions is the argument that a woman leaves her natal home to join her husband mainly for sex because material things like clothes are available at home. Mbuya Mushandira reintroduces the discourse of body ownership, “*your husband’s body is also yours, you play with it...especially when you go to bed...you caress his body...Yes it is yours.*” Some of the women’s descriptions go beyond Mbuya Tamba’s question “*Is it not that when you are in bed together you caress the man?*” and give wives almost equal power and responsibility to initiate sexual intercourse and declare their sexual interests, explicitly or covertly. The two following excerpts reveal both verbal and non-verbal strategies that a woman could employ to negotiate sex,

Mbuya Mushandira: A woman could entice her husband after bathing by taking off her clothes and asking for favours, ‘Could you please check what’s on my back? There is a pimple on my back, could you please rub or massage me?’ When you go to bed, give him your back for a while, fidgeting and rubbing against his body...fondle and caress his head. The more you touch him, the more he gets sexually excited.

Mbuya Zvitura: Hey you, the night is almost over! What is your problem tonight? Are you sick? What happened to you today, what is wrong with you, why are you so quiet? (Husband: I am just resting) What makes you tired after taking a shower? I want you here (Husband: laughs). You can laugh, but I want it now, so that we can rest once we are done. Let’s ‘hit the drums’...let’s do it.

As the interviewees conceptualise sexual interaction as giving pleasure besides being for procreation, they illuminate the complexity of heterosexual relationships which contradict the long-standing construction of women’s sexuality as passive and subordinate. The women represent themselves as equal partners, who not only negotiate sex, but also derive pleasure from sexual intercourse. Mbuya Mushandira reveals how her aunts prepared ‘transitioned women’ to engage sexually with their bodies upon marriage. Her narrative depicts how she was taught and internalised that sex was a mutual engagement between a husband and his wife, “*They taught me that, don’t just sleep motionlessly like a log during the act! You are expected to respond by holding him firmly on his back...make it a point that you teach each other.*” Mbuya Mushandira adds that she complied with this sexual advice “*when I got into that room with my husband, I did what my aunt had taught me*” – which suggests that she was active in bed. Mbuya Nguvo’s account, “*They said when your husband is playing with you,*

you should lift your waist and enjoy as well...I enjoyed when my husband was doing it. We both enjoyed big time!" reflects how the socialisation process influenced the pleasure she drew from sexual intercourse. Mbuya Mataka goes into more detail,

We used to put our legs on a man's back, and then one would loosen up her lower body. But as soon as the man showed signs that he was about to come, you would then relax and push your body towards the man so that both of you could enjoy simultaneously. Sometimes I would even climax before him, but never 'cry' [climax] before the man...let him come first.

When Mbuya Nzimbe asks, "*Why would he please himself? The husband had to please me!*" she is deconstructing the hegemonic representation of women as sexually inferior beings who primarily serve to please men. To begin with, Mbuya Zvitura asserts that a woman is supposed to entertain her husband, but then she adds, "*Even myself, I am also supposed to enjoy. So, all of us should make each other happy.*" The interviewees expose the bond between women's and men's sexual pleasure, and as Mbuya Mataka explains above, either the pair reach climax simultaneously, or ejaculation is followed by a wife's orgasm, or vice-versa.

Fighting bodily invasion

The elderly women do not overlook the gendered power dynamics and contestations inherent in sexual relations. Mbuya Shanga feels her limited power as a woman did not allow her to challenge her husband for depriving her sexually during his five-year stay in South Africa, "*Even if I missed him...I had no power to question him.*" Mbuya Bvura points out that a wife's resistance to having sexual intercourse was reported to representatives from both families, who would try and find a remedy. Mbuya Bvura describes this interrogative exercise as a long-standing practice with precise norms and values. Although resistance to sexual intercourse was generally condemned, she also points out incidents when such behaviour was condoned, "*you are not allowed, unless if you are sick or having your periods.*" Mbuya Zvitura for that reason says, "*I gladly offered him whenever he wanted.*" The way Mbuya Mushandira distinguishes between an aggressive and a reasonable man serves to depict the gendered power struggles within sexual interactions. The former 'would

just grab his wife and do it against her will'. Mbuya Pumho indicates that there was some degree of coercion in her sexual relationship,

He would just force it without us reaching a consensus...he would go on and do it without any agreement.

Exploring the connection between coerced sex and alcohol consumption, Mbuya Nzimbe recounts how her husband would come home and “do it when he was heavily drunk.” Mbuya Tamba alleges that some men would deprive their wives of sex when they were intoxicated, “they will, be so drunk that they even forget there is a wife out there.” She reinforces the need for a wife to exercise agency and negotiate sex – a point of view that Mbuya Zvitura agrees with, “you should try and initiate, even if he comes from the beer-hall heavily drunk.” Mbuya Mataka’s efforts to negotiate sex “Is this the right time to come back home from the beer-hall? I am always alone...there is no-one to take care of me here”, were resisted by her husband. In fact, Mbuya Mataka’s husband reminded her of her gendered place in the home,

You should know the reason why you are here...to just cook for me, ensuring that I eat period! You should not control me like that...I am neither your child nor your father!

Some interviewees had to deal with ‘appalling’ gender-based violence as a result of these power struggles. Respondents like Mbuya Zvitura see these power struggles as a consequence of alcohol abuse, “he used to hit me when he was drunk.” Mbuya Mere shares her ordeal, “Oh, this one...he acted as if he was possessed, after having some beer! You see all these missing teeth? He was a real monster...I swear to God!” Portrayals of their husbands as “evil-spirit or demon possessed, bad-tempered and monsters” speak volumes about the magnitude of this violence. The missing teeth along with scars engraved on most interviewees’ bodies serve as permanent symbols of how these women survived against all odds. To this day, Mbuya Mere’s husband condones his abusive actions and language (“I beat you so that you could wake up and switch on”) based on stereotypical constructions of women as passive.

The transcript narratives suggest that gender-based violence imbued these women with a sense of resilience which manifests in the diverse strategies that they employed to circumvent abuse. The ability to fight back provided Mbuya Pumho with the means to construct herself as an equal partner capable of overpowering her husband during violent acts, “We used to

fight a lot [but] it was now a win-lose situation. Take it or leave it...that was the spirit!" These power struggles presented some women with the opportunity to deepen relationships with their neighbours, who were a haven during trying times. Similar to Mbuya Bvura, who ran to her neighbours for refuge on several occasions, Mbuya Zvitura tells how she exercised agency, *"I got to a point where I was so alert...whenever I sensed danger, I would prepare a good meal, eat with my children and quickly disappear and hide."* For Mbuya Mere, however, seeking refuge provided only a brief respite because her husband would come and fetch her and beat her all the way home. 'Running away' represents her decision to go to her natal home where the husband had to negotiate to get her back. She recounts, *"He came with the police because he sensed that if he approached me alone, I was going to run away and hide. That is how I came back and he never hit me again...we have aged together and he can't hit me anymore."* The notion that the abusive husband engaged law enforcement agents suggests that power shifted from the perpetrator to the perceived victim – a shift the couple embraced right into old age.

How some respondents interrogated patriarchal subordination is of particular interest. After being reminded of her inferior position within the household, Mbuya Mataka stood her ground, and told her husband, *"I have failed to live under your 'government'...I am leaving."* Consequently, she exercised her agency and started an independent life, *"I came to my senses and realised that we were not meant to be, and I left him."* Mbuya Mere, who gave up on her marriage despite the effect of her absence had on her children, says, *"I had to value my life first."* Although Mbuya Zvitura initially put up with the violence in her marriage, she reveals how she eventually freed herself from the hands of 'the monster', *"But when he grabbed an axe and ran after me, I told myself that I did not commit any crime and I left him alone."* The common thread holding these narratives together is the notion of self-worth, along with the determination to be free. Speaking about their agency now makes them realise and appreciate what they could have experienced had they not decided to break the cycle. To quote Mbuya Zvitura,

Thank God I made the decision to leave him, otherwise I could have died!

The question posed by Mbuya Tamba *"Do you think people could get married and pleasantly stay together without fighting?"* frames the power struggles within marriages as intrinsic and normal. Mbuya Mataka traces how relationships often evolve and shift between romance and

violence, “*You will get to a point where you lick each other, but with time, everything will go wrong! It will be as if you stink...as if you have human shit all over your body.*” Mbuya Pumho, who had a similar experience met these power struggles with resilience and endurance despite her husband’s behaviour, “*He was annoying, especially after a few calabashes of beer, but we stayed at our home fighting all the battles together.*” Corresponding to Mbuya Tamba’s assertion that power struggles are some of the challenges that couples should strive to overcome, Mbuya Zvitura locates the endurance discourse within the realm of sexual engagement,

Even if you were mad at each other, ‘grandfather and grandmother’ [genitals] never yell at each other or get angry...and when it is time to make love, they just say ‘let us do our job’. So you need to completely forgive each other and have sex.

Her narrative separates the sexual organs from ‘the angry self’ and constructs them as ‘independent beings’ that can make decisions irrespective of how the rest of the body feels. The unwavering relationship between the sexual organs suggests that intimacy should not be affected by external factors. That notwithstanding, the preceding paragraph portrays women’s bodies within sexual relationships as a complex site of constant struggle and negotiation.

The politics of family planning

Constructing themselves as reproductive beings, the interviewees use their bodies to depict the ideological shifts that Zimbabwe has gone through before and after independence. Their narratives on conception and fertility not only point to the absence of family planning in the early days of their motherhood, but they depict the politics and power dynamics that came with its introduction. Mbuya Ngeno simply says “*we never had such things long ago*” to highlight the absence of family planning pills, but Mbuya Shanga goes further, “*those pills where not yet there during my entire motherhood*”, which was before the war. Mbuya Shava adds that even the village health workers who used to teach women about family planning in the early 80s, were not there then. As such, Mbuya Mere describes the history of family planning by making the claim that “*the tablets were only introduced yesterday.*” Mbuya Ngeno is not certain when the pills were introduced, but she is sure that if they were there before she entered menopause, she never took them. Hence the claim,

God actually planned everything for us!

Flowing from this religious discourse is the notion that for the majority of interviewees, family planning happened naturally which hints at the impact of Christianity on the reading of sexuality and fertility. Mbuya Shanga, for example, describes how she ‘spaced’ her children using natural methods, “*I gave birth, breastfed and weaned my baby, and immediately after weaning I would conceive again until I had eleven children.*” Mbuya Nzimbe refers to specific years to show how the ‘breastfeeding-weaning’ method worked for her, “*my children were born in 1974/79/81/83/88 and 1991.*” The method is best described by Mbuya Mere, who uses the metaphor ‘*mupise dire*’, which refers to the process of brewing traditional beer over a fire. Once the beer is cooked, it is poured into another container to allow fermentation to take place, and to make space for the next pot of beer to be brewed. ‘*Mupise dire*’ expresses how Mbuya Mere breastfed her baby and then weaned it in preparation for next conception. However, Mbuya Vatsa problematises this method by drawing attention to variations in fertility. She distinguishes between ‘*nyoka inorumurisa*’ and ‘*nyoka inorera.*’ The former applies to those who have one child after another because the wife conceives easily. An example of easy conception would be Mbuya Dzachi, who gave birth twice between 1985 and 1986. Although Mbuya Tamba does not understand how she conceived twice between 1970 and 1971, she admits,

There are no doubts that I breastfed when I was already pregnant with my next baby.

Reflections on their experiences of motherhood also point to withdrawal as another natural method of family planning. Mbuya Zvitura’s use of ‘we’ in the narrative, “*that was how we planned and spaced our babies*”, suggests that both husband and wife were involved in making the decision to use this method. Besides describing how the withdrawal method worked, “*he would swiftly withdraw and you would move away as well, so that he ejaculates outside your body*”, Mbuya Mhiri’s narrative explicitly frames women as equal partners when this method was used. Mbuya Zvitura implies that her husband relied on her fertility cycle for effective implementation of the method,

My husband never ‘finished the business inside’ when he knew I could get pregnant!

Even though the women's discourse hints at the use of traditional medicine for family planning purposes, the way most interviewees distance themselves from such medicine is noteworthy. The exception is Mbuya Tamba, who says "*I was instructed to use some medicine which I did.*" Mbuya Shanga and Mbuya Dzachi imply that they never took any medicine. Mbuya Zvitura, like Mbuya Mhiri, not only distances herself from the use of medicine, but she comments how childbearing ended naturally at menopause, "*we just followed our fertility patterns right up to the end.*" This assertion is an explanation why most interviewees ended up having as many as ten or even fifteen children. Mbuya Zindoga is unapologetic about having a large family, "*we conceived and gave birth until the womb gave up.*" Mbuya Pumho marks the end of childbearing with a religious discourse,

I gave birth until God stopped me...until he stopped my period.

Emerging from the elderly women's reflections is a sense of agency, and resistance to control of conception. Mbuya Mushandira, for instance, tells how, towards the end of her childbearing period, she was given some family planning pills at the clinic, but she did not take them, "*I told myself that I will continue to conceive until it stops on its own, so I gave birth to one more child and it stopped.*" Central to the arguments supporting resistance is a gendered, societal expectation that a woman should bear as many children as possible. Mbuya Tugu asserts that the idea of a woman preventing herself from conceiving was culturally unacceptable. To substantiate this, Mbuya Mushandira states that a wife was expected to make the most of every opportunity to conceive, in order to expand the clan. Mbuya Pumho describes how she met that expectation, "*my duty was just to give birth without any plan, and I never avoided conception...I gave birth like a goat!*" Mbuya Nzimbe emphasises her wifely role by posing the question, "*Why would I 'block' the uterus? I just conceived and gave birth to my children because that was the reason why I left my natal home.*" There were some cases that contradicted these culture-based narratives. For example, a woman's aunts policed her conception patterns as Mbuya Tugu reveals,

After realising that their niece was conceiving anyhow, aunts would then look for 'mishonga yokusungira' [traditional medicine] and give it to her to intercept conception.

Mbuya Mhiri describes ‘*mishonga yokusungira*’, which entailed tying some medicinal twigs around one’s waist, two on the left and two on the right. However, there were power struggles and violence over the use of these medicines. Mbuya Tugu alleges that women kept the medicine away from their husbands because traditionally, some men were against the idea of family planning and they would hit their wives for using them. Mbuya Mhiri rules out the possibility of keeping ‘*mishonga yokusungira*’ a secret because the twigs were always around a woman’s waist and her husband would see them during sex. Besides, “*if you hid the stuff, he would accuse you of having extra-marital affairs, as soon as he discovered the medicine.*” The two women agree about the conflict that emerged when ‘western’ family planning was first introduced. Mbuya Mhiri says that, initially women were reluctant to use the pills for fear of being cross-questioned, “*Why do you use those pills? Are you a prostitute?*”, and being victimised for doing so. Mbuya Tugu frames family planning as a point that wives were constantly negotiating at the time of independence,

Husbands wanted to know whatever it is that was stopping you from conceiving. So some women were beaten up, if they delayed conceiving again, even though they never disclosed that they were using some pills.

In spite of these reflections that situate women as bodies existing to procreate, respondents show how women navigated the complex cultural spaces surrounding family planning. Women established strong alliances in order to manipulate their way around sensitive cultural prohibitions. When family planning was introduced women used to role play to teach each other how to utilise the pill. The role play quoted below provides a sample of the type of the small talk which the women employed,

Mbuya Tugu: You continue to conceive in this day and age of family planning! You should plan and space your children using these pills. [Colleague: How do you manage it? If my husband sees the pills...it gets complicated.] Mbuya Tugu: The strategy is you claim to be sick and you go to the clinic. When the nurses give you the family planning pills, empty all the sachets into a different container. As soon as you get home, show your husband the container, ‘Daddy, these are the pills that I was given at the clinic for my condition.’

Mbuya Mere identifies with this strategy. She was inspired by another woman who argued that she would die if she continued to have children. She divulges how she manipulated her husband who, to this day, believes that she was not supposed to take the pills, *“I put them in a bottle which I had taken to the hospital...I kept them out of his reach in the house.”* Mbuya Mere asserts that she took advantage of his problem with alcohol to implement her strategy, *“I took all the pills, and this ‘king’ didn’t suspect anything, not even one day! He only knew about beer-related issues.”* Mbuya Ndari’s husband, on the other hand, did not put up any resistance to family planning, so she used the pills without any problems. Her experience suggests that men’s attitude towards family planning shifted over the years since she continued to conceive into the late 90s. She says that she negotiated with her husband, outlining the merits of family planning,

I disclosed everything, explaining to him that ‘in order for us not to have one child after the other...it is best that I take these pills’, and he really liked the idea.

Mbuya Ndari celebrates the benefits of planned pregnancies. She argues that a woman has a breathing space between pregnancies, and the chance to cope with the pressures of being a wife and mother, and the burden of domestic work. Mbuya Mataka was never ‘properly married’. For her, the politics of family planning has to do with patriarchal ideologies governing women’s sexuality. She justifies her resistance to family planning to the absence of a ‘husband’ during her pregnancies. She says, *“There was nobody in my life, so there was no way I could have engaged in family planning alone.”* Mbuya Mataka represents her situation with the phrase *“ndaingokuva vana ndichisa pamukova”* which indicates how she conceived and bore children indiscriminately while living at home with her parents.

Silence and tensions over children

This sub-theme is predominantly about discourses over the number of children which manifest either as silence or tensions. While Mbuya Dzachi asserts that she was usually in agreement with her husband regarding the number of children, Mbuya Mhiri exercised her agency and acted against her husband’s wish by conceiving ten times. Mbuya Mhiri uses a religious discourse to argue that her husband was being stupid for *“God said give birth and multiply. Why didn’t he want us to have many children, where would I get some relatives?”* Similar to Mbuya Mhiri, Mbuya Ndari justifies why she gave birth to nine children without

any regrets, *“I am satisfied with what God gave me.”* She allegedly turned a deaf ear to people who teased her about her reproductive choices, *“Some even questioned why I opted for many children, but I insisted that I had a passion for children right from the beginning.”* For Mbuya Nzimbe, to claim that as a couple they discussed about the number of children would be a lie, *“it was just natural.”* Mbuya Tamba, who also had eleven children, simply says *“it just happened.”* The rationale for this silence is to be found in the cultural obligation to bear children for the sake of the clan name. Consequently, women’s pregnancies were not determined by economic status, or their ability to provide for those children as Mbuya Dzachi points out,

We just had our children, regardless of whether they were clothed or not.

Closely related to the question of the number of children is the discourse about tensions and silence over the children’s sex. Interpreting her husband’s silence on the subject, Mbuya Nzimbe, who first had and four sons and then two daughters, argues *“maybe that was the reason why he kept on impregnating me several times”* to increase his chances of having daughters. Mbuya Zvitura’s narrative recalls how her husband interrogated her because she kept having baby boys, *“he questioned why I was not having a single girl, and he even said it was unheard of in his family.”* She stood her ground and countered the interrogation with the argument that the sex of children was/is not a woman’s choice, but God’s. Although Mbuya Mhiri mentions the possibility of *“converting the uterus”* by using traditional medicine to enable a woman to give birth to the desired sex, whether a boy or a girl, Mbuya Zvitura deconstructs this claim by asserting that *“God is the one who plans!”* She concludes that whatever happens in a woman’s uterus is beyond the knowledge of any human being.

Giving voice to the traditional nursing system

The transcript narratives about the liberation struggle are not simply stories about the battlefield. Rather, these are representations of dominant discourses around body politics, gender and sexuality. Questions about the liberation war bring back recollections of motherhood, especially the politics of pregnancy and the place of the traditional nursing system before and after Zimbabwe’s independence. The war is a discursive event through which the interviewees reveal that, in the absence of health care services, midwives played a significant role in assisting women – including those sexually abused and impregnated by the

comrades – to give birth at home. Mbuya Tugu comments, “*It got to a point where almost all the elderly women got used to midwifery because there were no services available at the clinics and hospitals.*” However, Mbuya Mataka, who like Mbuya Mhiri and Mbuya Pumho, only gave birth at home, emphasises the significance of midwifery before the war. She acknowledges the presence of health care centres, and the fact that there was no service fees at the hospitals long ago such that giving birth at home was a choice some women made without any regrets. An example is this statement by Mbuya Mushandira,

Hospitals and clinics were there, but we just preferred giving birth at home...so I gave birth to eight of my ten children at home. I only gave birth to two in the hospital after my mother-in-law, who was my midwife, passed away.

Of great significance are the complication-free births associated with the traditional nursing system. Mbuya Mushandira provides statistics, “*traditionally, a woman gave birth to eight, twelve or even fifteen children at home, with minimal complications.*” Mbuya Pumho draws upon her child-birth experiences to describe how smooth the process was, “*I gave birth to all eight children at home with the assistance of my husband’s step-mother, and I never had problems like a breech baby.*” On the other hand, Mbuya Tugu acknowledges there were rare occasions when pregnant women suffered complications, but the midwives of her generation knew how to insert their hands, turn and position the baby so that it could be delivered naturally, and they also pulled out the placenta. Mbuya Mhiri, who was an experienced midwife substantiates her expertise, “*If I realised that the baby’s legs were likely to come out first, I would turn the baby to ensure that the head comes out first.*” Mbuya Dzachi, who is still practising as a midwife, describes the process of delivering a baby,

My grandmother taught me that the moment you notice that your pregnant daughter is due you take some slimy grass and generously apply on her private parts. Make her sit in a proper position, supporting her back with a bag [used as a pillow]. When she shows signs of pain, insert your index and middle fingers into her poo-hole and if it feels hard, that’s the baby’s chin that would have gone down. Keep your fingers there, and as she breathes in and out help her make the pushing sound whilst pushing with those two fingers because, the baby’s chin would be directly pointing at her poo-hole. As soon as the poo-hole softens, leave it and receive the baby with both hands.

The elderly women's discourse relates that midwives also provided 'traditional antenatal care' in order to minimise labour complications. Mbuya Ndari refers to '*haritsva*' – a practice where a woman was sent to her natal home, so that her aunt or mother could 'sort her out' in preparation for child-birth. Loosely translated, '*haritsva*' means a new clay pot. My interpretation of the metaphor is that such a pot becomes more durable after being used on fire several times. From this interpretation, '*haritsva*' implies that a woman could deliver her second baby anywhere because the first baby would supposedly have 'opened the way.' Mbuya Dzachi expands the antenatal discourse when she refers to the use of '*mushonga wemasuwo*' – traditional medicine, which is meant to loosen a pregnant woman's pelvic bones in order to avoid vaginal tearing during labour. According to Mbuya Mushandira, midwives frequently inserted their hands into the vagina as part of the process of 'opening the way for the baby'. Mbuya Mhiri draws on her personal experience to delve into the cultural norms governing 'traditional antenatal care' where herbs were involved,

I took that medicine for the 'entrance'...my maternal grandmother gave me. She also urged me to mould some sliding ropes into a ball...like your braided hair [pompom] and I inserted it right inside the 'cheek of the uterus', keeping it in there the whole day so that my muscles could stretch. One should, however, leave a piece of string hanging out, so that they could pull out the ball. In addition, a woman who is using some herbs should not have sex otherwise the vagina tightens, resulting in complicated labour.

Twelve out of sixteen women experienced both worlds as they had given birth at home and in hospital. They speak of the co-existence, or rather an 'integration' of the traditional nursing system with western medical structures during and after the colonial era. Contrary to Mbuya Shanga, who gave birth to all her children at home because the idea of giving birth at hospitals was not yet common before the war, other women's experiences shed light on the rationale behind the interplay between these two systems. Mbuya Mere recalls, "*Sometimes I had labour pains before going to the hospital and I would just give birth at home.*" Mbuya Mhiri and Mbuya Dzachi provide information about the history of Zimbabwe's medical system, in particular, the impact that the geographical distribution of health care centres had on pregnant women. Mbuya Rava, whose experience was similar to that of Mbuya Nzimbe, reports that the distance from her home made it difficult for her to access a health care facility,

Harava clinic is quite some distance from here...I gave birth to two of my children at home before I started my journey...In fact, two of my pregnancies terminated before I got to the hospital.

Even though waiting shelters were established at hospitals to reduce pregnancy-related complications, expectant women found the arrangement unsatisfactory because there was no reliable transport system. After walking several kilometres to St Anthony Hospital to receive antenatal care, Mbuya Nguvo was told to go home and come back with clothes for the baby, but when she got home, she was about to deliver the baby. Walking back to the hospital would have been futile, so she exercised her agency and delivered the baby herself, “*my legs were swollen and I could hardly walk, my baby was about to pop out, I got inside the house and gave birth on my own...there was nobody at home!*” In the early 90s, Mbuya Tamba had a similar experience because the hospital was at a considerable distance, and the transport system was poor. She remembers,

I gave birth across the river, up there by the dam side, when I was on my way to the clinic on foot. My mother-in-law, who was escorting me to the clinic, assisted me in delivering the baby. She ran around looking for any sharp object in the bush, so that she could cut the umbilical cord, and eventually, she used a stick. We just wrapped the baby with some cloth that I had packed in the baby’s bag, and I bathed in the river and we went back home with our baby.

Her choice of words suggests that she values the traditional nursing system as much as the hospital, despite the fact that she gave birth to nine of her eleven children in hospital. For example, when asked why she did not proceed to the clinic for a medical check-up, Mbuya Tamba replies with another question, “*Isn’t it that I was going to the clinic just to give birth? So where was I expected to go, when I already had my baby?*” As she justifies her decision, she reiterates the effects the poor transport system had on maternal care. Heavily pregnant women had to walk all the way to the clinic, “*there were no cars to transport us, so I didn’t expect to walk anymore after giving birth.*” It is against this backdrop that the traditional nursing system became the most viable option for antenatal care because the mothers of pregnant women realised the practicality of taking their daughters to the midwives. Unattached women like Mbuya Mataka also found midwives very convenient,

I preferred giving birth at home, probably because I had no husband of my own to take me to those hospitals.

Of particular interest is the correlation between institutionalised antenatal care and the traditional nursing system. For instance, the way traditional midwives inserted their hands, and turned a breech baby (Mbuya Tugu and Mbuya Mhiri refer to this practice) is similar to the way medical doctors deal with complications related to pregnancy through surgical intervention. Practising midwives suggest that if combined, these two systems could complement each other, and achieve more than either could on its own. According to Mbuya Nguvo, such integration could possibly reduce the maternal mortality rate, and reduce the violation of women's reproductive health rights where lack of finances and geographical distance made getting to medical centres a huge battle. The integration could also lead to the development and recognition of women as nurses, key 'in-between' figures in the public health system in Zimbabwe and the region as well.

Shifting institutionalised antenatal care

As sixteen of the respondents share their pregnancy experiences, they profile their intimate engagement with a health care system located in shifting socio-economic and political landscapes. The narratives break-away from representations of defunct hospitals and clinics during the war to focus on the positive experiences of the post-independence years. Mbuya Rava sets the tone of interviewee's experiences at government and mission health care centres after independence, "*Some of us gave birth when it was still Rhodesia and also soon after independence, it was a different story compared to now.*" Mbuya Shava simply describes the situation at the hospitals as good, but Mbuya Nguvo reveals that mission hospitals like Morgenster had doctors who worked very well. Mbuya Dzachi gives details of the quality of maternal care then,

Even if you got to the hospital heavily pregnant at night, as some of us did, you would give birth without any hassles.

The discourse of maternal care takes this discussion to narratives about the absence of fees for delivering a baby in a hospital. Mbuya Mere proudly recounts that women used to go and

give birth and come back home without having to paying a cent. As Mbuya Zvitura reiterates that there were no fees, she makes specific mention of the fact that whites ran the mission hospitals, “*We received some tablets at Musiso hospital which was run by white people...they gave us for free.*” In addition, the introduction of waiting shelters at hospitals at this time is viewed by all respondents as the new government’s strategy to cater for women’s bodies during pregnancy. Mbuya Bvura reveals below that these waiting shelters were specifically meant to minimise chances of complicated labour,

Upon discovering that I had twins, during a routine antenatal check-up, the nurse instructed me to move into the waiting shelter until I gave birth.

Mbuya Shanga, like Mbuya Zvitura and Mbuya Bvura, highlights government welfare activities, for example, through the provision of blankets and groceries – such as mealie-meal, meat, beans, groundnuts, maize cobs, *kapenta* and soap – to women in the waiting shelters. Mbuya Tamba appreciates the hospital providing pregnant women with clothes for the new baby, “*we were given a towel, some blankets and some knitwear, knitted by those people at the mission hospitals.*” Mbuya Mushandira agrees with Mbuya Shanga. They both feel that the situation was better then,

It was quite easy because if you had your two cents or pennies, you could afford to buy some napkins. It was really affordable compared to the current situation.

This reflection suggests that changes to the economy negatively affected the provision of health care, including maternal care. Mbuya Zvitura’s experience points to both economic and structural shifts over time, “*But when I gave birth to this one, well after independence, the system had changed because I had to pay for staying in hospital.*” She asserts that over and above the medical fees, she had to make arrangements for her meals because the hospital was not providing this service anymore. Mbuya Ndari adds that it became mandatory for a pregnant woman to buy clothes for the baby prior to going into hospital, “*they actually told me to bring my own bag with the baby’s clothes.*” On the other hand, Mbuya Mushandira approves of the changes but she dismisses the strict enforcement of these maternal care regulations. She recounts that a woman could even use some pieces of cloth as diapers, “*even if you bought some flannel material, a towel and some napkins, you could go like that!*” The narratives of those women who bore their last child in the first decade of independence frame

‘strict maternal care regulations’ as a recent development. Otherwise, buying clothes was an individual choice as Mbuya Vatsa recalls,

In most cases, I used to buy a few clothes for the baby, and then buy some more after being discharged.

It is however imperative to note that the shifting economic landscape was experienced differently depending on one’s financial position and geographical location. For instance, the introduction of service fees was never an issue for Mbuya Vatsa, who claims that the fees were very affordable because her husband was working. In line with the common assertion that the fees were insignificant then compared to now, Mbuya Ngeno quantifies the fees as “*a few dollars.*” As a wife of a professional man, she had the freedom to choose the hospital where she wanted to give birth. Hence her claim that all her maternal needs were met,

I would just say ‘I want to go to Morgenster’, a huge hospital, because we had the money to do so. I used to go with a bag full of clothes, and I even bought extra items which were not requested by the hospital.

Mbuya Shava’s experience was very different. For her, raising money to buy clothes for a baby whenever she went to give birth was very difficult because she had no income. She found these regulations, along with the hospital fees so prohibitive that she chose to give birth at home. Mbuya Mushandira admits that “*life was getting tougher*” towards the second decade of independence, and for that reason she learnt to put aside some baby clothes for future use, after weaning her son or daughter. The statement “*so I never bought new clothes, when I had a new baby, I just used stuff from previous pregnancies*” suggests that Mbuya Mushandira, who gave birth to five of her ten children after independence, employed adaptive strategies as she navigated the shifting economy and the aftermath of the infamous 1982/3 drought.

Negotiating with gendered parenthood

This section re-engages with the women’s views about the politics over their children. Mbuya Bvura not only asks “*Do you think they could be the mother’s?*” She answers her own

question in a way that distances her from child ownership, “*They belong to their father.*” Mbuya Mhiri poses the question, “*Why and how would they be the mothers’? Am I a prostitute?*” which illustrates how moral discourses have defined women’s sexuality, reproductive rights in particular. Mbuya Tugu points to long-standing cultural ideologies that have shaped this discourse, “*our culture, since time immemorial, says children belong to their father.*” Mbuya Mere, like Mbuya Dzachi, reads women’s supposed limited rights over children in the light of the cultural practice of *lobola* payment,

Children belong to their father because he is the one who took me from my natal home and brought me here. As long as I am here, I am not supposed to focus on that...it is the responsibility of the one who paid lobola for me.

These cultural arguments are countered by a religious argument, a position from which women reclaim their reproductive rights. Mbuya Mhiri, for instance, acknowledges that “*to some extent, I was allowed to say that the children were/are mine as well because we got married in church.*” Reasoning within this framework, Mbuya Shava argues that children belong to both husband and wife, but on condition that they remain married, “*they only become the husband’s upon divorce.*” Mbuya Dzachi adds that, the moment a woman decides to go back to her natal home, she leaves all the children with their father. Like Mbuya Mere and Mbuya Bvura, Mbuya Dzachi takes into account the distinctive biological roles that men and women play during procreation,

He is the one who makes babies...I am just a nest in which to lay eggs...so children belong to the father.

This description draws on the way birds lay eggs and keep them in a nest until they hatch, but it does not follow that the new birds belong to the nest. The same principle is deployed in representing a woman’s body as a ‘shelter’ that merely ‘houses’ a baby for nine months, but once out, that child belongs to a man. Mbuya Tugu acknowledges the role that men play in reproductive spaces, but she subtly constructs women as equal partners based on their ability to conceive. Furthermore, Mbuya Tugu rejects the long-standing claim that children belong to their father by arguing that “*the role that men simply played was to impregnate us and never took care of the children.*” Mbuya Mushandira shares how her husband, who spent most of his time drinking beer in the village, neglected her in the third trimester of her pregnancy,

“He never remembered that there was a pregnant wife at home...so one of my children escorted me to the clinic.” These narratives not only subvert men’s alleged ‘superior’ role, they also reduce a father’s role to a reproductive one, as appears in Mbuya Shanga’s account below,

I only had a single child when he first went to South Africa...then he came back and we had our second child, but when he left again, he only came back after five years, and we had the other nine children.

For Mbuya Bvura, the deconstruction of patriarchal roles within the household is all about how the husband, who denied her access to family planning, failed to provide for the eleven children that he fathered. On the same grounds, Mbuya Tamba finds the claim that children belong to their father a contradiction. She argues that when a child gets home from school and asks his or her father for a pencil, the father quickly refers the child to the mother. This scenario is good platform for Mbuya Tamba to interrogate men concerning the up-keep of the children, *“I rhetorically ask my husband, ‘Ok...go and tell your mother because it is now time to provide for these children?’”* In similar vein, Mbuya Bvura asserts that the mother is the one who fights all battles, yet society says the children belong to the father, merely because descent is traced through men,

As you can see right now, these day old chicks...a cock can afford to wander around, but a hen like a mother makes sure that the chicks are warm and fed. No matter where or how far she is from her children, a woman stresses over what they eat and wear.

The preceding analysis suggests ‘wife neglect’ the moment a woman conceived, for very few men bothered to take care of the children. Thus the analysis challenges hegemonic notions of masculinity, especially men’s reproductive function and their long-standing role as breadwinner.

Motherhood battles and ‘states of the nation’

Women’s diverse gendered experiences of motherhood go beyond deconstructing patriarchal ideologies. They also reflect how the socio-economic and political terrains in Zimbabwe have shifted over the years. The women’s life stories also suggest that the transition from Rhodesia

to Zimbabwe was that of negotiating and re-negotiating gendered parenthood. Juxtaposing the dominant discourse of parenthood with the socio-political shifts, the interviewees re-draw the road to independence so as to illustrate the battles that they fought along the way. The liberation struggle emerges as a discursive event, through which interviewees revisit their experiences of gendered parenthood as Mbuya Zvitura's words show,

Those were really hard times! I remember running away from the brutal war, whilst carrying one of my babies on my back!

Reflecting on male-biased migration patterns in colonial Zimbabwe, the women represent how they exercised their agency and brought up families single-handedly. Mbuya Shanga deconstructs her husband who sought employment in South Africa for only bringing home a small amount of money when he returned after five years, “*Could we count on that one who disappeared? Not at all*” However, Mbuya Zvitura reveals the autonomy she enjoyed in the absence of her husband. She made decisions independently, free from his authority,

I told myself that this was my only chance to make a difference for my sons' sake, whose future heavily relied on my decisions.

Some motherhood battles in post-colonial Zimbabwe depict the merits of independence. Similar to Mbuya Ndari, who asserts that the country was in good shape at independence, Mbuya Bvura reveals that ‘a lot of things’ were introduced when the country was finally free of colonial rule. The post-colonial era is perceived as a space where the ‘new’ government engaged in activities aimed at cushioning its citizens from the shifting socio-political circumstances. While Mbuya Bvura says “*we enjoyed the era*”, Mbuya Mushandira suggests that the joy of independence was transitory. Her analysis of ‘states of the nation’ in post-colonial Zimbabwe concludes that,

When something has just transitioned, it does not immediately become bad...life was much easier at and after independence, but eventually, it got bad.

The above narrative is a way into discourses about the socio-economic and political changes that the ‘new nation’ went through after independence. Mbuya Mere points to the impact the shifting political economy had on the price of commodities which is suggestive of the

depreciation of the currency over the years, *“That thing...the one you call romance soap, we used to buy it for ‘take’ (a cent) but it got tough later on.”* The women’s narratives on ‘food for work’ – a government initiative in the early 90s which was meant to cushion rural communities from the aftermath of the 1992 drought – hint at shifts in the economy over time. Commenting on the ZW\$3 and the food her family received for participating in the food for work programme, Mbuya Mushandira says,

We could buy some groceries and send our children to school because the money still had economic value.

With the exception of a few interviewees who had economically secure husbands after independence, the transcript narratives suggest that structural and ideological shifts adversely altered the labour market. Mbuya Dzachi points out the retrenchments within the teaching field after independence. Mbuya Tamba uses the 1992 drought as a discursive event which denotes the impact structural and ideological changes had on household income, *“My husband did not survive the 1992 retrenchment when most workers lost their jobs at the sugar estates after the sugar canes were heavily affected by poor rainfall.”* Mbuya Tamba goes on to say that the 1992 retrenchment coincided with the introduction of service fees, and life was hard generally. The discourse around the introduction of school fees also offers an insight into how Zimbabwe’s economic landscape has shifted since independence. Reflecting on her efforts to educate her children two decades after independence, Mbuya Mushandira claims,

For those who were born in 1984 and 1986, by the time they got to Grade 7, and worse Form 4, life was really tough...but before this era, life was very much easier.

Mbuya Nguvo remembers that *“long ago, we never used to pay school fees”*, and Mbuya Mataka deploys the discourse of school fees to distinguish the ‘new’ government from the colonial one. She clarifies that there were no social welfare services in the form of school fees during the liberation struggle, and attests that such services were only introduced when Mugabe came to power. Mbuya Ndari suggests that because the ‘new’ government has had to deal with a volatile economy, it has treated the education of its citizens as less of a priority. Evident in her narrative *“it [school fees] was not a difficult amount to handle compared to now...it is very tough to raise the fees these days”* is a comparative, ‘then and now’ discourse.

Although Mbuya Dzachi admits that “*coping was a huge challenge*” in the absence of any income, many women often engaged in a variety of labour intensive jobs, which ranged from farming, beer brewing to cattle rearing, in order to raise school fees for their children. Motherhood was an on-going struggle for Mbuya Bvura because it also meant dealing with an abusive husband, who was also a drunkard,

I really had to strategize as a mother. I used to take all my children with me, to either work in other people's fields, or fetch some water and brew some beer, in order to raise some school fees, but my husband was a monster for real! He went to the school and demanded the money back from the headmaster. He ordered me to go back home with him and he hit me all the way. By the time I got home, my whole body, especially my back was swollen.

Overall, the stories of motherhood portray great physical endurance and psychological resilience as women battled against all odds to educate their children and put food on the table – with minimal, if any help from their husbands. For example, Mbuya Mere reveals that her ever drunk husband knew that raising children was all about farming but he never bothered, “*My husband's assistance would bring a bad omen, I tell you! Sometimes I ploughed when I was heavily pregnant, whilst carrying a baby on my back.*” From the way that the women struggled to provide for their families within Zimbabwe's shifting political economy, one can re-conceptualise the breadwinner role differently from the traditional association with men. Consequently, a breadwinner becomes a woman who engages in work that provides the household with an income. Thus Mbuya Tamba reclaims her (equal) rights over children saying “*they belong to both of us*” based on the reality that she literally ‘roamed the whole world’ fending for the family.

Chapter conclusion

The preceding chapter engages with the political shifts that pushed women into diverse gendered positions within private and public spaces of colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. Emerging out of what appear to be simple narratives of how interviewees became wives and mothers are insightful discourses of how women often negotiated for recognition in colonial Zimbabwe. The elderly women adopt independence as a discursive event that placed them at

the centre of nationalist debates. These nationhood discourses allow the elderly women to interpret the meaning of living through a gendered and sexualised body in a country that has experienced dramatic socio-economic and political changes. Contrary to the stringent colonial limitations on mobility that at the same time policed gendered bodies, the elderly women's lived realities tell a story about how the politics of identity shifted so that by independence, women were considered citizens who enjoyed the right of 'being Zimbabwean'. Representations of women's bodies and motherhood battles emerge as useful tools for re-imagining colonial Zimbabwe and years that followed independence.

Of great significance is how as 'new citizens' the interviewees embraced a plurality of complex identities at and after independence. An analysis of these identities exposes the diverse ways in which representations of women's gendered bodies mirror the transition from colonial to independent Zimbabwe. The infrastructural shifts in the medical sphere, for example, move these elderly women to try and make sense of the effects the transition had on women's bodies. It emerges that representations of their bodies tell a story of how the 'new state' gradually failed to meet the reproductive rights of women as 'new citizens'. Nursing experiences suggest that the health care system deteriorated over time such that being a pregnant woman in Zimbabwe barely two decades after independence meant negotiating with prohibitive regulations and fees. By the turn of the 21st century, pregnant women had to deal with a number of obstacles to get to hospital quickly and receive treatment timeously, when the baby was due. The obstacles include the lack of a sound transport system, limited medical personnel and treatment facilities. Hence, the interviewees' experiences of pregnancy and child-birth, before and after independence, mirror the gendered ways in which Zimbabwe has evolved as a nation. The nationhood battle becomes that of citizens sexed as female constantly grappling with shifting contours of the post-flag democracy.

Beyond the nationalist discourses discussed above, the elderly women embrace their Shona identity to represent what it meant to be identified as a Shona wife in colonial and independent Zimbabwe. While culture through socialisation legitimates women's status as 'good wives' who should respect sexual boundaries between men and themselves, the discourse of 'women as sexual beings' suggests that women are somewhat not bound by gendered sexual scripts. The discourse of 'women as sexual beings' portrays how the interviewees have transcended biological differences which are often used to justify and reinforce a hierarchical structure dominated by men, with respect to sexual desire and

pleasure. In addition, sexual discourses expose the diverse ways in which women have overcome the complex patriarchal ideologies and responsibilities which are tied to their identity as wives. Depictions of themselves as equal sexual partners, who prepared their bodies for sex within marriage so as to ensure that their personal sexual desires were fulfilled during intercourse, deconstruct representations of women's sexuality as inferior and subordinate (see McFadden, 1992). Thus, women emerge as equal partners, who are at liberty to exercise their agency by responding to sexual intercourse in a fulfilling way. The depiction of women as sexual equals concurs with what Machera (2004:168) refers to as "sexual paradigms" through which women cease to experience sex as the obligation to fulfil for men's sexual demands. The women's sexual paradigm deconstructs those patriarchal structures which "associate sexuality in Africa [...] with pain, suffering and mourning", and not pleasure (Reddy, 2004:3 cited in Makinwa-Adebusoye, and Tiemoko, 2007:3). The central discourse is that as the paradigm shifts, it challenges diverse institutions which perpetuate male hegemony within heterosexual unions (McFadden, 1992:168), and positively impacts on the discourse of sexual rights.

Representations of how some interviewees experienced culture as the mechanism through which men violently accessed their bodies and sexual spaces, frame gender-based violence as a continuous battle that women fight for the greater part of their lives. However, it is not simply the fact of gender-based violence that is significant, but it is how interviewees have resisted visible and invisible patriarchal barriers undermining their bodily integrity and sexual rights within a heterosexual order. Examples are narratives of how some interviewees embraced their equal sexual positions and made conscious decisions to leave abusive husbands – a move that is contrary to the culture of endurance within marriages. The interviewees' wifely stories do not in any way reinforce existing stereotypes. Rather, their narratives are replete with progressive images of the bedroom as a site of struggle where hierarchal sexual power relations are contested. These findings reinforce the "subtle but persistent challenges" to a patriarchal order that women presented in rural and colonial Zimbabwe (Wells, 2003:103) as part of their efforts to resist being subjugated to men.

The chapter could not help but engage with interviewees' discourses of body ownership within heterosexual marriages. Under this sub-theme, their representations challenge the general perception that women have less access to and control of re/productive aspects of their bodies. Upon realising their re/productive abilities, women's narratives shift and use a

language that problematises the hegemonic image of men as 'superior' beings within a heteronormative order. Home becomes a space where the institutionalisation of gendered roles is reversed as women occupy positions and fulfil roles previously reserved for men. As a result, the women's discourses deconstruct patriarchal perceptions of men as the sole head of the household (see Silberschmidt, 2004:240) and assign power to the purported weaker sex. Altogether, this chapter depicts how 'discourses around bodies' serve as a useful analytic tool for remapping women's gendered experiences in colonial Zimbabwe and the years that followed the country's independence.

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Chapter 7: Passage of time

In this chapter, I present a dominant ‘now’ discourse that I have suppressed throughout the previous analytic chapters. The elderly women’s diverse lived realities, and their personal observations, have shaped this discourse and their narratives continually shift between ‘now’ and ‘then’. As these women make sense of the shifting socio-economic and political landscape in present-day Zimbabwe, they interpret change in ecological and dietary terms. Drawing upon my understanding of Zimbabwean rural societies, the meaning of the seasons was traditionally determined by either the quantity or the size of wild fruits. The abundance of specific fruits symbolised a very dry spell. In her interview, Mbuya Mere distinguishes ‘then’ from ‘now’ through the changes in wild fruits, “*as I walk around now my grandchild, I see ‘maroro’...they are very small, but they are almost ripe and I tend to wonder...how could it be that possible?*” Embodying ‘then’ as an era of early rains and good harvests, Mbuya Bvura differentiates between what is for her a traditional and a modern way of life in dietary terms. Reasoning similarly to Mbuya Zvitura, Mbuya Bvura asserts that long ago, children had healthy bodies because their mother used to prepare mushroom and a wide range of vegetables³⁷ with peanut butter. She laments that modern children are neither strong nor healthy for they are raised on food cooked in oil. Mbuya Mataka reads change climatologically, and interprets the dry spells in relation to the rainfall pattern over many years,

It is different now, times have changed! Even seasons are changing...yes, there is a significant change! Today is 10 November and we haven’t started ploughing, but before we used to receive our first rains around 15 October. You see this rain that literally ‘fills a calabash’...it is enough for us to begin to grow crops, but it won’t rain again until December...so we have since adjusted accordingly...we now till the land in December when we receive our first rains, then we receive more in January, and this determines whether we will have a good harvest or not.

This shift in the rainfall pattern assigns meaning to the dry spells and bad harvests they have experienced in the last years where the most recent economic situation has created totally different realities from those of memory. Mbuya Mataka recalls her mother harvesting a lot

³⁷ Including ‘*nhangarara* and *munhanzva*’ – vegetables from the mountains.

of grain and groundnuts and for Mbuya Bvura, images of herself mark the passage of time. Reading the image in her identity document, she says, “*Those round cheeks confirm that we had enough food long ago. Oh, like a ‘real’ woman...did you see that? But now, it is completely different!*” As she draws my attention to the ‘youthful’ image in her identity document, she evokes deep and strong connections between her past lived realities and ‘now’. Her image conveys different realities, which on one hand hint at ‘real’ womanhood, and on the other, the changes in diet. Hence her conclusion,

Truly speaking, our life long ago was really good...you are in trouble these days. You now have a lot of problems...Indeed, it is different!

The women’s discourse is replete with comparisons between ‘then’ and ‘now’. This chapter is about two different relationships to time, one in which the interviewees feel marginalised and ignored, and the other about ways to create relationships between past and present realities. The chapter is structured in a way that allows engagement with the discourse of separation, first. This discourse pays serious attention to the disjuncture between the elderly women and the ‘children’ of today. At the centre of this discourse are the discursive politics of condemnation and alienation, which I analyse through sub-themes such as the child and ‘bad morality’, discourses around language and disrespect, discourses of sexuality and education, the challenge of ‘preparing genders’ in today’s girls, and the discourse about *lobola* and men. Secondly, I will explore a discourse negotiating some ‘connection’ between these two generations. The discourse revolves around the sub-themes: marriage, sex and money, and abortion, which are enmeshed in the socio-economic institutions and the political situation. Thereafter, the analysis will shift towards the interviewees’ engagement with discourses about their own sexuality through recreation of the ‘herbs’ advice, gender and embodiment, as well as the HIV/AIDS discourse. Woven together, these discourses create a discursive space pertinent to re-reading sexualities and the meaning that these elderly women attach to contemporary Zimbabwe.

The discourse of separation

The child and bad morality

As I engage with the ‘then’ and ‘now’ discourse, questions revolve around the sexuality of contemporary ‘children’ from how ‘they’ dress to how ‘they’ interact with the opposite sex in public and private spaces. In response to these questions, Mbuya Tamba sets out the appropriate behaviour parameters embedded in a moral discourse, *“a girl of good morals hardly walks aimlessly with boys or even being escorted by boys...never!”* Policing such a girl’s movements requires that her life should revolve around home, school and church so as to minimise ‘unnecessary’ interaction with the opposite sex. However, Mbuya Ndari puts her views very bluntly,

...most children are not of good morals anymore.

The theme of ‘the child and bad morality’ where the interviewees read ‘children’ and their sexuality as different is not really about ‘Zimbabwe’ alone. Rather, the theme is a thread about marking the passage of time, which serves to locate the interviewees in an age-old, ‘us and them’ relationship with the younger people. For instance, Mbuya Dzachi asserts that the traditional norms and values do not exist anymore, *“unless if you are talking about us old people, who continue to uphold the values that we internalised long ago...it is very clear that I am from long ago, based on the way I behave.”* When asked whether these emerging sexualities could be interpreted through ecological signs of change mentioned above, Mbuya Mataka affirms, *“that is the change I am talking about, times are changing!”* Mbuya Tamba also interprets the changing sexual mores in the light of seasonal shifts,

Honestly speaking, these children no longer have morals at all. It is very difficult for us to control these children because times and seasons have changed...generally, the country is going through some change.

The elderly women’s narratives of morality, control over ‘children’ and their own distress over the changes in sexual norms engage in serious discussion on how contemporary socio-economic and political milieu is to blame for the change. Mbuya Dzachi alleges that *“the world in which we live is very dangerous because it has brought new ways of life! Of course, we are independent as a nation, but there is moral decadence among today’s youth.”* As they interpret the meaning of sexuality in contemporary Zimbabwe, the elderly women revisit traditional constructions of femininity and masculinity, and are very conscious of the profound shifts in the conceptualisation of sexuality today. It is the absence of traditional

adolescent activities that is central to their analysis of a collapse towards ‘immorality’. For instance, Mbuya Mushandira, Mbuya Dzachi, Mbuya Mhiri and Mbuya Zindoga point out the disappearance of communal nude swimming, ‘*matumbatumba*’, and of all-night games they engaged in themselves. Constructions of heterosexual relationships and perceptions of a shift in the manner that boys and girls interact are replete with questions about immorality and violence. The possibility of re-introducing traditional games in the contemporary context is not there. Alluding that “*people would rape each other under the water the moment boys set their eyes on the breasts*”, Mbuya Zindoga is clear that young women are vulnerable to a male sexual gaze unknown in her own adolescence. Reasoning similarly, Mbuya Bvura suggests that “*chances are high that they might leave that pool pregnant.*” She also points out the likelihood of abuse during ‘*matumbatumba*’ with its role play of marital duties, “*these young children might take advantage and think that they have found a wife.*” It is clear that the ‘young children’ she is speaking of are young men, and although she still uses a metonym (‘found a wife’) to describe sexual intercourse, her distrust of the ‘young children’ is strong.

It is not simply young men who are described as dangerous. Mbuya Dzachi frames contemporary girls as ‘stupid’, in comparison to the young women of her generation, and equates their behaviour to that of wild animals. Blaming changing times for this wild behaviour, she alleges that these girls engage sexually as early as thirteen years when they have their first period. She asserts “*like wild animals, girls will have sexual intercourse with whomever they meet. I don’t really know what and how they could be tamed again!*” Likewise, Mbuya Mere’s claim that traditionally women controlled themselves at puberty confirms that there has been a shift towards sexual ‘immorality’ since then, “*yes, they did, not what is happening these days...it is just too much.*” Mbuya Rava draws upon her personal experience to confirm,

As for us, we never used to do that long ago...actually we enjoyed our youth and we respected each other.

The use of a comparative discourse serves to cement the disjuncture between the interviewees and younger women. To depict this separation, Mbuya Dzachi pays attention to ‘sex-talk’ which was unknown when she was an adolescent. She reads these children’s way of speaking as a shift in everyday language, “*When they are playing, you hear them saying, we do embarrassing [obscene] things.*” Mbuya Zvitura, akin to Mbuya Rava, uses the shift in

contemporary children's language to mark the passage of time, "*We never used to talk about sex related-issues unless one was being coached or prepared for marriage. Not what is happening these days, 'sex talk' is commonplace, you hear about it everywhere.*" The way contemporary children interact with each other leaves the elderly women wondering what the source of such behaviour could possibly be. In an attempt to find an answer, Mbuya Dzachi poses a fundamental question, "*what exactly are they taught?*" It becomes apparent that the discourse of the child and 'bad morality' constructs a contemporary child whose behaviour is incomprehensible and alien to these women from an earlier era.

Discourses of sexuality and education

The question "*what exactly are they taught?*" drew my analysis towards the theme of education as a route through which the interviewees explore a current Zimbabwe, from which they feel so alienated. Their reflections correlate education and notions of gender and sexuality in a country which has seen dramatic socio-economic and political change. Mbuya Rava and Mbuya Vatsa both speak of the situation in Zimbabwe today and the absence of education. The former says "*...it is tricky given the current state of the nation*", and the latter: "*it is difficult to tell because there were disturbances of late.*" Mbuya Dzachi gives more detail, "*they are not going to school because schools have never opened ever since the beginning of the political upheavals...the country is in bad shape.*" Mbuya Zindoga equates these political disturbances with 'war', and sees the absence of education as detrimental to young children's sexuality. She describes how these children keep themselves busy throughout the day if they do not go to school,

If this 'recent war' is to strike again, it will negatively impact on our children. Those young children that are in Grade 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6...even those in Grade 1, do not spend the whole day here... hell no! They only come home at sunset when they are hungry...they spend the whole day climbing up trees, swimming...doing all sorts of things...so the country does not have any dignity anymore.

This breakdown is a discursive way into exploring the interplay between emerging sexualities and discourses of education. Mbuya Dzachi explains, "*now that they don't go to school at all, they spend most of their time wooing each other as they ramble through forests. Their core-business is dating...even very young children say 'I love you' to each other.*" Her analysis

shows that disruptions in the education system have the power to influence the sexuality of today's children. She goes on to lament that their major concern in the absence of education is fornication because “*anybody who drops out of school behaves stupidly whether male or female.*” Clearly, the absence of education due to government induced disruptions is blamed for the negative shift in sexual mores among young children. Mbuya Tugu theorises that allowing young women to proceed with their studies would greatly reduce the number of teenage pregnancies and marriages because their minds would be on their studies. Mbuya Dzachi agrees with Mbuya Tugu that education is a possible solution to the emerging ‘wild behaviour’,

It is better for them to be in school, where we feel they should spend most of the time with the teacher receiving better coaching and advice. They are also inspired by progressive colleagues at school. At the end of the day, they go home where they engage in domestic chores, rest and retire to bed. As this routine continues, time for stupid behaviour is reduced.

This analysis recognises the tensions and contradictions that emerge as women engage with discourses of sexuality and education, especially representations that condemn the school curriculum for young children's sexuality. Shortly after applauding the school for the secondary socialisation of children, “*If it wasn't for these challenges we experienced in the recent past, children were learning a lot at school*”, Mbuya Vatsa then condemns the same education system. She alleges that the situation is worse now because “*young children adopt 'stupid' ideas from what they read at school.*” The new school curriculum, which provides some sex education, absent when the interviewees went to school, is a powerful analytic lens through which emerging sexualities could be understood. Mbuya Tamba blames the school curriculum for emerging sexualities, and suggests that it is only after being exposed to subjects where they learn about the reproductive health system that ‘children’ experiment sexually,

I believe subjects like Science are the ones that have brought new ways of thinking among these children because they now know a lot of obscene stuff more than us. Young children who are still going to school even know what the process of getting pregnant entails.

Mbuya Zindoga also holds the school accountable for the behaviour change among children and condemns the use of audio-visual teaching aids, specifically. She alleges that visual teaching aids on family planning and sexually transmitted infections expose children to obscene stuff prematurely, *“This kind of teaching has corrupted these children...they see romantic stuff when they are way too young.”* For Mbuya Mhiri, exposure to family planning information leads to sexual experiments by today’s children, *“it is at school that they are introduced to ‘tubes’ [condoms] such that those who are adventurous use them.”* Mbuya Ndari expands this argument by asserting that nowadays girls start taking family planning pills when they are way too young, *“hence they saturate their bodies.”* Mbuya Ndari questions why these young girls take the pills, and she concludes that it is at school that girls are ‘brainwashed’ by their teachers, *“How do you expect her not to do it when she has learnt that if you do ABC, you won’t get pregnant?”* Although Mbuya Rava agrees that children learn bad behaviour at school, her excerpt below indicates that young girls have limited knowledge of family planning,

I have observed that they come home from school already pregnant...they no longer learn anything at school, so they just experiment sexually with each other.

These elderly women do not put the blame for bad morality solely on the school. Rather, they lay equal blame on the media. Mbuya Zindoga frames the kind of advice and teaching about life that children get through the media as very dangerous. Mbuya Vatsa’s observation *“honestly speaking, they are now animals because of the TV programmes...that is where most of these children copy the ‘stupid’ behaviour”* affirms the influence the media has on children’s sexual conduct. She adds that visual media gives young children the wrong sort of information to the extent that such ideas become normative for these children, *“the TV programmes are obscene but these children are so used...they are not even ashamed to watch.”* Mbuya Mhiri also points to a collapse towards immorality, *“the programmes teach them about prostituting.”* For Mbuya Zvitura, obscenity increases the probability of being intimate, as evidenced by early marriages and teenage pregnancies,

These children become intimate, or even marry and impregnate each other at a younger age than before, probably because they now read about everything obscene at school, including how it [sex] is done.

By acknowledging that “*things have now changed, young children adopt new behaviour through reading and watching TV*”, Mbuya Vatsa frames education (including media education) as a discourse that marks the passage of time and perpetuates the alienation of the younger generation, particularly girls, from the elderly women. Overall, the discourse of the child and ‘bad morality’ serves as a measure for assessing contemporary children’s sexuality embedded within changing socio-economic and political terrains in Zimbabwe.

‘Preparing genders’ in today’s girls

The discourse of separation is further explored through the respondents’ coaching experiences which suggest that sexualities stemming from the socio-political changes in Zimbabwe reject long-standing notions of womanhood. The transcript narratives suggest different ideas about sexuality in contemporary Zimbabwe, where formal education is portrayed as a new source of information for the younger generation. The elderly women depict how the formal education system has ‘taken over’ from the ‘traditional community or village education’ of their era. As a new source of information, formal education brings new challenges since grand/mothers are consistently reminded about the generation gap between themselves and their grand/daughters. Mbuya Rava, for example, introduces the challenge of ‘preparing genders’ in today’s girls,

Long ago, we used to take advice from our elders, not what they do these days...they believe in their textbooks, nothing else!

Mbuya Nzimbe also asserts that contemporary children take advice from nobody, “*They believe in their books more than their parents.*” It is evident in what Mbuya Dzachi has to say below that she believes that girls rely on a new source of teaching – the education system – and sees this as totally different from the traditional aunt, mother or grandmother. Efforts to ‘teach’ or coach daughters into ‘real’ womanhood at home are ‘futile’ as the elders are constantly reminded of their own limited education during childhood, a position which also illustrates a shift in gender disparities in contemporary Zimbabwe, for girls are educated,

You are not educated...you didn’t go to school...that was your era...yes. You know nothing, and there is absolutely nothing that you could tell us! As for us, we know everything because we read about it. Hence, we know a lot of stuff at an early stage.

Recollections of their personal experiences of 'preparing genders' today reveal that formal education has displaced the custom of celebrating the transition from girlhood to womanhood. Commenting on 'the fading practice', Mbuya Vatsa alleges that even if you encourage the girls to 'wake up' and elongate their labia from the blankets, instead of going to the river, they would not, "*these young girls do not want to pull the labia, I am telling you!*" My womanhood as a 'young Shona girl' was then interrogated and put to the test by Mbuya Mataka,

Do you still wake up in the morning and go to the river these days? Never, you no longer do it! Do you have...? [KB: No!] Why don't you have? [KB: No-one taught me!] I even laugh when I go to the river and see that these girls have got nothing...Oh...like a baby's mouth without teeth!

Surveillance and control issues demonstrate gigantic changes in behaviour because these youngsters have the courage to question their elders' sexuality when they are reproached by the latter. Mbuya Nzimbe repeats the response that elderly women normally get when they attempt to advise young girls, "*But you were also like this...how come you want me to behave in a way that you yourself failed to adhere to?*" Mbuya Vatsa and Mbuya Zvitura reason that the chances of being interrogated are higher when trying to advise someone else's daughter. Reproach is often met with questions such as "*Who are you to tell me how to behave...are you my mother?*" Or "*What makes you think that you will be able to advise me when my own mother fails to control me?*" These questions increase the distance between the elderly women and today's girls. Mbuya Dzachi, who insinuates that contemporary girls' behaviour ranges from arrogance to some degree of autonomy, also believes in the challenge of 'preparing genders' in today's girls. She argues, "*These children are full of themselves and independent...they don't pay attention to whatever we tell them...they no longer take advice seriously.*" Any attempts to interrogate the girls about their sexuality, which are based on moral prescriptions, are highly contested as evidenced by the questions that contemporary girls commonly ask when their sexuality is policed,

Am I pregnant? What have you seen on me? Do you know where I was? You don't expect me to play at my friend's place...right? But you are married, and you have a husband! [Mbuya Dzachi: Of course, I am married, but I didn't get married that

way.] *That was your era, we are different from you! [Mbuya Dzachi: But there are diseases!] Death has always been there...we shall all die!*

What do you want to see? What do you think happened to my virginity? [Mbuya Pumho: Let's check down there, maybe you have an infection.] Why do you make baseless accusations? Have you ever seen me roaming around with men? Even if you check, and realise that there is an infection...what are you going to do about it...are you going to treat me?

An analysis of all these exchanges reveals that the elderly women's discourse is embedded in ideas about their own lack of value, and in the construction of their knowledges as 'past'. Drawing on her coaching experience, Mbuya Dzachi reports that young women often say, "All you know is your traditional and archaic stuff that your grandmothers taught you." Similarly, Mbuya Pumho asserts that girls frame the elderly women's advice as lies which the younger generation should not buy into, "Do not listen to these elderly women's lies...chances are high they bring you misfortunes!" The elderly women's presentations of the 'facts' about preparing young women for sexual intercourse are full of statements about their being ignored, and stigmatised, and generally, how they are bewildered and angered by such rejection. For instance, Mbuya Rava points out the marginalisation of elders and their advice, by asserting that young women no longer go to their aunts for coaching,

They just do their own thing, and all you are told as a mother is that your daughter is now pregnant.

Mbuya Vatsa speaks in her capacity as an aunt, a role she never plays. She cannot play the traditional role because none of her nieces has ever approached her for coaching on "how it [sex] is done." Instead, the nieces deconstruct normative counsel around sexual intercourse by claiming, "We know-it-all." While Mbuya Vatsa does not understand the basis of such conduct, she finds the young women's standpoint highly suspect based on the argument that 'contemporary marriages' do not thrive, "The unions do not last at all." The elderly women often question these girls in disbelief, "You are back...already? But you said you're able and you can handle it, is this how you handle it?" Hence the interviewees revisit the discourse of education in their analyses of the generation gap between old women and young girls. For example, Mbuya Nzimbe brings in her illiteracy to try and unpack this disconnection, "some

of us fail to understand this kind of behaviour! Is it because you are now able to speak in English, which some of us can't speak?" If the response is affirmative, Mbuya Nzimbe insists that gender and sexuality issues be documented by "those who are educated", that is by researchers studying the subject. Her concluding remarks signal a hope in the curriculum for she argues that it is better if young girls read about sexuality on their own, otherwise,

They will never listen to a poor granny, who is ignorant and uneducated. So by writing down such issues you [KB] are doing a great job I tell you!

The accounts of the challenges of 'preparing genders' today depict a new Zimbabwe, where there seems to be no such thing as 'becoming a Shona woman.' Although not discussed above, the interviewees also reveal that the discussions of sexuality have shifted from the confines of the home to the church where a few select mature women are meant to coach young women in preparation for marriage. However, the church as a new platform fails to address these emerging sexuality concerns. The interviewees' experiences of coaching reveal a persistently widening gap between the younger and older women, as evidenced by their dichotomised relationship to each other.

Lobola and men

The interviewees' concerns about, and bewilderment at, the marginalisation of their advice by girls are discussed in the light of the 'absence' of *lobola* in present-day Zimbabwe. Mbuya Vatsa points out drastic changes to the marriage customs, which traditionally drew two families to the negotiating table. She reports that "*it is very rare for lobola payments to be made these days. Instead, contemporary children quickly become 'husband and wife'.*" What Mbuya Vatsa means is that these children have sex as soon as they are in a relationship, which is contrary to the traditional custom where *lobola* payment marked the beginning of the couple's sexual roles. Mbuya Rava adds that these children no longer respect each other "*for they now exchange gifts [nduma] in the bush*", where there is no aunt present. Mbuya Zindoga expands on this assertion in order to show the shift in marriage patterns,

As soon as a girl is given 'nduma', she sleeps with the boy. Assuming she gets another 'nduma' from a different man, she sleeps with him, and by the time she gets married, she would have 'known' several men.

As the respondents search for possible explanations for this change, they locate their questions on emerging sexualities in the marginalisation of the traditional role of the aunt. The question: “*Do you ever see any daughter who takes her boyfriend to her aunt for introductions these days?*” which was posed by Mbuya Rava marks the passage of time. Mbuya Nzimbe feels that the relationship that existed between the aunt and her niece is no more, for they no longer visit each other. Mbuya Nguvo agrees that “*people no longer value their aunts and their role*”, which again indicates the continuing weakening, or rather the fading of this traditional practice. Contemporary girls get married without the proper coaching, and in ‘undignified’ ways that run counter to the traditional order. According to Mbuya Vatsa, “*Most of them elope, but we never used to do that traditionally.*” Mbuya Nguvo emphasises that traditionally, a woman could not just move in with her boyfriend without *lobola* being paid because payment came with more sex-related advice from aunts,

Once lobola was paid, aunts would tell you what you were expected to do. Not what is happening these days!

Mbuya Mhiri elaborates on what was expected to follow *lobola* payment in her time. She says that the new wife was not supposed to go straight into her husband’s bedroom, “*you would sleep in the kitchen with your mother-in-law/grandmother until they took you to his bedroom.*” Mbuya Dzachi and Mbuya Zindoga expand their analyses of contemporary sexual norms and they state quite explicitly that ‘these girls elope and head straight for the blankets.’ When young women choose to elope, they miss out on essential coaching or training in preparation for sexual intercourse, for example, learning how to ‘clean’ a man after sex. Mbuya Zvitura remembers how she used ‘exclusive bedroom toiletries’ that she had received from her aunts before she left for her husband’s home,

We used to keep some water in our bedrooms in containers, and I used this water to ‘clean’ my husband after the ‘game’. I would take my cloth and wipe myself and my husband whenever we finished our ‘job’, and he would walk out of the room a clean person. I would then wash the cloth in my dish using the soap, throw away the water, clean the dish and take it back into the room without people noticing.

The women's discourse does not simply condemn the young girls and their sexuality. Rather, it recognises the impact of the changing socio-economic landscape on *lobola*, both as an ideology and a practice. Mbuya Ndari, who concludes that people have neither cattle nor money for *lobola*, also admits, "*There is a shift in societal norms and values because of the challenges and hardships of life.*" Mbuya Zindoga points out the exorbitant *lobola* prices, and for Mbuya Mhiri, the inflation of the *lobola* payments is a marker of the passage of time, "*ZW\$2 was enough to cover all lobola payments.*" Mbuya Ndari's question: "*If your son-in-law pays all that...what will he use to take care of your daughter?*" challenges a process that seems to 'commoditise' women's bodies. She deconstructs the demand for exorbitant *lobola* by arguing that it brings shame to the family, especially in the event of a divorce when in-laws' talk often revolves around their cattle that have 'perished'. Hence, Mbuya Ndari emphasises that *lobola* should strengthen the social relations between the two families, and according to Mbuya Zindoga, this understanding has been lost,

It no longer serves the purpose of just uniting families.

Mbuya Ndari also condemns men for deliberately evading *lobola* payment. She asserts that some men have the money but they even fail to pay "*tsvakirai kuno.*" This is an initial payment which is made after a daughter elopes. Its purpose is just to inform the parents of the whereabouts of their daughter, or to begin marriage negotiations. Mbuya Vatsa highlights that in cases where the initial payment is made, it is a challenge to re-introduce *lobola* negotiations because the man concerned will be convinced that he has played his part, "*It's a struggle, I swear to God! No matter how hard you try to introduce the subject, no-one will listen to you...no-one will give you the lobola.*" To depict this type of evasion, Mbuya Vatsa refers to an increase in the incidence of women eloping and then dying before the *lobola* has been negotiated. The bodies are left in the house to decompose because *lobola* has to be handed over before both families can bury the deceased.

The interviewees find the use of the term 'marriage' problematic when there has been no *lobola* payment. They contest the contemporary use of the term to categorise a woman as married the moment she elopes and lives with her boyfriend. In response to questions about her daughters' marital status, Mbuya Tamba expresses her reservations, "*Do you think I can raise my lips as a mother and say my daughters are all married, when we received no lobola at all?*" She is adamant that she cannot refer to 'contemporary unions' as marriage because

traditionally marriage should involve *lobola* payment. Her question also points to her bewilderment and anger at her shuttered hope of benefiting from the payment of *lobola*, “*I did not get any cent from anybody, never!*” Mbuya Bvura also speaks as a mother who has not seen *lobola* paid for her daughters. Initially, she categorises her daughters as ‘married’, then abruptly rephrases the word ‘married’ as if to distinguish ‘contemporary marriages’ or (eloping) from ‘proper’ marriages where the traditional practices were observed,

All my children got ‘married’, but none of my in-laws paid lobola for my daughters, except for one...my first born...She is the one who really got married, I tell you. Her in-laws gave us some cattle and ‘clothes’...eventually they paid up the remaining lobola, including the mother’s cow...yes, I was given my cow. As for all those who got ‘married’ after her, I never got a cent from their husbands.

Mbuya Dzachi concludes that “*what these children are now doing is not marriage at all.*” The language she uses does not simply condemn contemporary children, rather she interprets contemporary sexual behaviour in the light of the shifting socio-political landscape in Zimbabwe. She defines these ‘marriages’ as “*an act of sheer poverty*” – a description which somewhat reduces contemporary relationships to a strategy for navigating the volatile economic terrains. Her analysis feeds into discourses around the interplay between sex and money that I am going to explore shortly. The absence of *lobola* has led to a shift in the expectations surrounding marriage, and Mbuya Dzachi admits that “*we only expect our children to bear their children even if it’s clear that they cannot take care of them.*” In addition, Mbuya Bvura suggests that discourses of HIV/AIDS have trivialised the traditional practice of *lobola* to such an extent that what matters now is that a woman engages sexually with one man only,

I never got a cent from their husbands...as long as they are settled in one place...yes, just that.

The diverse representations of *lobola* and men demonstrate how contested the discourse is. Contrary to the discussion above, Mbuya Nguvo insists that *lobola* payment should be made because “*the woman is not related in any way to this man!*” Mbuya Shava also interprets *lobola* payment as a necessary token of appreciation given to the parents of the girl. Mbuya Nguvo grounds her analysis in the transfer of uxorial rights upon marriage, and she argues

that a woman will never get an opportunity to work for her parents once she is married. Hence there is need for *lobola* payment, “*since they gave birth and brought her up, parents expect to receive some lobola that will help them.*” Mbuya Ndari reads the common failure to pay *lobola* as a thread that marks the passage of time. She concludes that people no longer value *lobola* at all, “*they have lost their norms due to changing times...this shows how life has changed.*” Mbuya Dzachi’s statement below affirms the elderly women’s distance from the younger women,

“Unlike us, who got married and our fathers enjoyed the lobola, we no longer expect our children to get married...not anymore”

The discourse around women’s experiences, husband’s and societal expectations regarding the payment of *lobola* is an important theme that connects gender and sexuality ‘then’ and ‘now’. As much as a woman wants *lobola* to be paid for her daughter, the reality of HIV/AIDS has resulted in the trivialisation of *lobola*. For these women, it is better for a daughter to live with her ‘husband’ than to hop from one man to another. Men’s perceptions of *lobola*, which are heavily shaped by the economic realities of present-day Zimbabwe, have impacted on the conceptualisation of marriage as a discourse ‘now’. In the absence of *lobola*, ‘contemporary marriage’ has become about eloping, which men find very convenient. The discourse of *lobola*, in the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, continues to roll and change with serious ramifications on the living arrangements in present-day Zimbabwe.

Emerging from the interviewees’ reflections on the discourse of separation is a constant battle for recognition. Given that becoming gendered ‘now’ is completely different from ‘then’, everything that should tie them to gender and sexuality is fundamentally interrupted. Such disruptions pose a huge challenge to the notion of family and kinship because these women do not see in their granddaughters a person they recognise or identify with. As a result, they construct a contemporary child who is alien to themselves; the girls are ‘bizarre creatures’ whose sexuality is incomprehensible. There is a strong sense of loss, marginalisation, alienation, condemnation and a dichotomised relationship to time. Therefore the respondents repeatedly question ‘whether they matter, are they still relevant or they are lost?’ It is clear that they are stuck with a series of unanswered questions for there is no strong link between ‘what was’ and ‘now’. This situation resembles the day to day struggle lived by millions of Zimbabweans in different situations.

Negotiating with time

In contrast to the discursive politics of condemnation and alienation, which were covered in the previous thematic section, this section presents discourses which (while sometimes also embedded in scepticism) reveal the elderly women as being in constant negotiation with 'then' and 'now'. These women occupy a different position of subjectivity. Instead of just condemning young girls, they work very hard to discursively theorise, analyse, debate, explain and juggle with the discourses of separation. They create relationships between 'then' and 'now' through their attempts to represent how contemporary women's bodies and sexualities are enmeshed with the shifting socio-economic terrains. As the respondents search for answers about emerging sexualities that bewilder and anger them, they negotiate with time. Here the women's discourse, which 'tacks back and forward' across the barrier of time, falls into three sub-themes: marriage, sex and money, and abortion. These themes generate a strategic position from which to constructively debate and theorise about contemporary sexualities – creating a ray of hope for the next generation and for Zimbabwe.

The marriage discourse

From the transcript narratives, it is apparent that the tremendous shift in the conceptualisation of marriage is of great concern to the interviewees. In her exposé of contemporary sexuality and marriage patterns, Mbuya Vatsa states that "*there is absolutely nothing positive these days, everything is now chaotic.*" Her analysis points out how the socio-economic and political changes reduce educated children's chances of obtaining formal employment. She describes how marriage became the only option for her nephew, after he graduated from university, "*everyone was highly expectant hoping that he would get a job and take care of the other siblings, but all is in vain because he marries one wife after the other.*" Mbuya Dzachi also believes that the lack of employment opportunities has led to the birth of new sexualities, for example, where virginity is no longer normative. She alleges that in the absence of opportunities, these children 'mix' randomly, regardless of their educational status, "*They either hop from one veranda to another at the township, or ramble through forests all day impregnating each other.*" Hence the theorisation that job opportunities could reduce the levels of "*stupid behaviour*" because the children would spend most of their time working, and would postpone dating or marriage.

Theorisations around ‘postponing marriage’ clearly suggest that the interviewees’ diverse reconstructions of marriage are located in contemporary girls’ serious pursuit of education/career. Although Mbuya Dzachi agrees with Mbuya Mushandira’s definition of ‘real’ womanhood that revolves around the expectation of marriage, the education discourse is central to her theorisation of contemporary relationships. She sees great potential in an educated woman, who is financially equipped to take on the challenges associated with establishing a home, “*Remember, one needs some resources...so if one is not educated what will she use to build a home?*” When theorisations of marriage are analysed from the perspective of education/finance, they challenge the limited access to education girls had in the past (as discussed in the first analytic chapter). For example, Mbuya Ngeno states that,

All a daughter knew within traditional societies was getting married and having children, nothing else!”

Challenging the conventional view of women as merely sexual and reproductive beings, Mbuya Ngeno asserts that “*somebody who is qualified is queen, they rule.*” Her assertion is particularly meaningful in contemporary Zimbabwe where young women enjoy the right to travel freely as they endeavour to meet the new socio-economic realities. The elderly women argue that as young women try and escape dire poverty by migrating to the cities and beyond, they exercise their agency in new spaces where they are not bound by societal norms governing sexual purity, nor are they pressured into marrying and bearing children. Mbuya Tamba asserts that a lot of things happen in these new spaces, for example, “*some of them take out their uterus...and live without one*”, a claim with which Mbuya Zindoga agrees, “*They leave the tummy empty, for sure!*” Consequently, the elderly women find that migration does not prepare today’s children for marriage because there is no physical interaction between a mother and her daughter.

Mbuya Ndari thinks, on the contrary, that these contemporary children generally have too much independence, and they resist coaching even if they still live with their parents. Her belief that neither distance nor a change in location should have any effect on one’s morals is based on the theorisation that “*if a child is of good morals, chances are high that she maintains that behaviour whether she relocates to town or overseas.*” The interviewees do not simply condemn young women, who live far away from home, for bad behaviour. Mbuya

Tugu, for instance, acknowledges that some of these girls get married in foreign countries, and those who venture into prostitution do so in order to adapt to the realities of their new circumstances. What is remarkable about this discourse is the constructive theorisation of ‘postponing marriage’, for economic reasons. Mbuya Tugu points to the financial situation in Zimbabwe, and asserts that most contemporary women find it easier to stay single, and to study and work so that they continue contributing to the household income. She therefore suggests that,

Some women postpone marriage because they feel that if they get married, they are likely to plunge into the depth of despair.

Further analysis suggests that cultural arguments prevail over economic ones. As much as Mbuya Mhiri and Mbuya Zvitura admit that the pursuit of a career is important, they frame marriage as the ultimate societal expectation. Society continues to police career-oriented women’s behaviour, for a woman is not expected to stay alone if she wants to be respected. Mbuya Shava, like Mbuya Mushandira, re-echoes the respectability discourse to infer that a woman should eventually get married because “*if she continues to study without getting married, she risks losing her morals and values.*” The women’s conceptualisations of the marriage discourse are full of prescriptions and expectations that a woman is morally bound by or must fulfil. Mbuya Bvura, who is pro-education, concludes that neither economic circumstances nor the pursuit of a career should deter a woman from getting married. Below I present some of Mbuya Bvura’s statements that depict her efforts to advise me as ‘a single young woman’, who is pursuing further studies. The statements also convey her concern about HIV/AIDS,

When you go back, do not refrain from getting married due to poverty...poverty has been there since time immemorial, so make sure you get married. It is not good for a person to stay alone. No matter how hard life becomes...a woman should struggle to establish her own home, like what [sic] others do, so that she earns respect. Each and every person is expected to get married, so that she can start her own family and give birth to her own children, who will, in turn, take care of her upon old age. Never hop from one man to another...you will never be able to break the cycle, and before you even notice, you will be gone...you will be infected.

Interviewees like Mbuya Dzachi reason that if a woman concentrates on her studies first, she will eventually get married no matter her age. In asserting that one's family does not have the right to dictate when one should marry, Mbuya Tamba depicts the agency a career-oriented woman could exercise, "*a person has the right to decide when.*" Mbuya Pumho's advice to me as a career-oriented woman: "*Go and do as I have told you...if ever you decide to get married*", leaves room to choose not to marry. The interview transcripts also create space for discussing the intersections of gender and race/ethnicity within contemporary marriage discourses. In this vein, Mbuya Zindoga suggests that migrant women are at liberty to explore and engage in inter-racial/inter-ethnic marriages, and Mbuya Tugu adds that, "*we often hear that some get married to white people in foreign countries.*" Contending inter-racial marriages, Mbuya Mhiri simply says "*white people are not that good*" but Mbuya Tugu spells out the cultural differences inherent in such marriages,

Her [a white woman's] lifestyle – from the way she dresses, what she eats, to the norms and values – is totally different from our way of life as black people. In addition, people have to communicate in English, which is not a problem for in-laws who can speak English, but my concern is that we would be more comfortable if we could speak in Shona. The situation is very complex my grandchild!

The next contention revolves around conceptualisations of marriage which take into account gendered cultural expectations for the new wife. The word 'morals' in Mbuya Shanga's statement, "*a woman who has no 'morals' at all*", does not refer to sexual morals, rather it describes how the general conduct of a newly married wife is policed by her in-laws. It is from this standpoint that Mbuya Tugu challenges inter-racial marriages arguing that the foreign wife cannot carry out her expected gendered roles. She therefore concludes that "*if a son settles for a foreign white woman, he is married, but he did not get married according to our culture.*" For Mbuya Mushandira, the 'inter-racial/ethnic marriage' discourse 'tacks back and forward' across the barrier of time, "*he now brings a foreigner, which makes the situation totally different from long ago.*" While she admits that her migrant son's chances of marrying a Zimbabwean are limited by the fact that he is based in a foreign country, the inter-ethnic marriages are of great concern to her,

Do you think I will be able to handle such a daughter-in-law? Our cultural backgrounds are different.

Mbuya Mhiri theorises that couples understand each other better if they are of the same culture, and the chances are high that they will grow old together. She therefore recommends that *“it would be better for a person to marry someone from Zimbabwe in order to maintain their cultural values and norms.”* The elderly women’s diverse representations depict marriage as a powerful discourse that allows them to create a discursive space for reconceptualising contemporary sexualities. Discussions about marriage entail serious theorisations about the interweaving of gender and sexuality into the discourses of education, culture, and migration, and what constitute opportunities in a country that has witnessed such dramatic change.

Sex and Money

The interviewees locate their interpretations of emerging sexualities in the relationship between sex and money. To substantiate that connection, Mbuya Tamba claims that when today’s children come across a man, they just ‘fall in love with his wallet’ so that *“before a girl knows his history/roots, she will be already pregnant.”* Although Mbuya Mataka has divulged how she was lured into a sexual relationship by an older man when she was a teenager, Mbuya Zindoga frames the practice of dating across generations as an emerging phenomenon, *“Even old men date young girls, this was never an issue long ago.”* She therefore frames the discourse of sex and money as a recent phenomenon, *“Long ago, young women didn’t have any passion for money like these contemporary children...they had morals, but these ones sleep around, no matter what!”* Mbuya Mhiri arrives at a different conclusion, one that condemns old men for the collapse of morality, *“Why would an old man with greying hair settle for his ‘granddaughter’? That’s stupid!”* Mbuya Zindoga’s analysis of cross-generational dating points to some degree of coercion,

...sleeping with a young girl and giving her some money for some biscuits in return, when you are old enough to be her ‘grandfather’, is nothing but lack of morals and bad behaviour!

In response to questions about possible solutions, Mbuya Tamba begins by arguing that *“there is absolutely nothing that could be done.”* Then she has second thoughts, her analysis illustrates how contemporary sexualities cannot be separated from changing socio-economic

conditions. She reasons that the changes that the country is going through put such pressure on young women making it virtually impossible for them to resist exchanging sex for money, “*these young children hook up with men to make ends meet because of the general life hardships in the country.*” It is against this backdrop that Mbuya Tamba introduces the discourses dealing with men’s refusal to take responsibility for impregnating young girls. Her statement, “*they do not marry these girls all they want is to have fun and not to take care of the child*”, leads her to allege that the young women who get pregnant under these circumstances often choose to abort the pregnancy because most men deny responsibility as soon as they realise that the girl is pregnant. Sex and money become a discourse which the interviewees use to negotiate a ‘connection’ between themselves and the young women as they try to understand what is behind ‘bad morality’. This generation gap can possibly be bridged by theorisations that recognise the influence of socio-political and economic changes on gender and sexuality issues in Zimbabwe.

Abortion discourse

The elderly women’s narratives hint that within this community there is an unrecognised discourse on abortion. For instance, Mbuya Dzachi alleges that “*there are so many pregnancies and incidents of abortion...some even abort when the foetus has already developed into a baby.*” Mbuya Tamba, as was observed earlier, echoes that some girls are impregnated by men they hardly know because they are dependent on using sex as a means of surviving. When Mbuya Rava describes the circumstances under which these girls fall pregnant, she emphasises the shortness of courtship, “*They just get pregnant after dating for a short period of time...and the boy does not accept responsibility at all!*” She sees abortion as a coping strategy, which most of these young women adopt when they realise that they cannot raise a baby on their own, “*Of course they are forced by circumstances to abort at home using traditional medicine, but it is not allowed in Zimbabwe.*” Mbuya Rava adds that these girls are in a desperate position when they face rejection after they have eloped. She poses a question: “*Where will she go with her pregnancy if you send her away?*” Her answer to her own question emphasises that a pregnant girl has no option other than going back to her mother. Mbuya Dzachi returns to the notion of men refusing to acknowledge paternity, and her comments point to socio-economic realities,

The boy goes his own way, but the girl brings a child home to her mother because sometimes the girl is impregnated by a herd boy, who has absolutely nothing. So it is better for you as a mother to stay with your daughter at home, and take care of her and the baby because even if she elopes, nothing materialises.

Mbuya Tamba also frames moving in/back with parents as “*the other option that girls have besides abortion*”, but she finds this option problematic because grand/parents have absolutely nothing to give the young woman and her child. She asserts that “*these girls abort, and others even give birth and dump the babies*” irrespective of the legal consequences. Mbuya Tamba also highlights that the reason why these girls engage in this illegal act is because there is no financial aid to support them and their children. It is vital to note that the respondents acknowledge that abortion is not ahistorical. Mbuya Nzimbe traces abortion and the fact that it is a criminal offence back to “*long ago*” when some people aborted using some herbs provided by people who knew about the medicinal uses of herbs. She recalls that “*this was a backyard practice since it was a criminal act...even now it is not allowed but, some people continue to do it.*” Similarly, Mbuya Tamba claims that abortion in present-day Zimbabwe is still a backyard practice,

I have never heard of any abortions that are done at the hospitals in this area...they just use traditional medicine/herbs at home.

These silences or complete absence of open discussion around the discourse are attributed to the criminality attached to backyard abortions. Mbuya Nzimbe claims that most people are reluctant to unravel the pregnancy mystery, and when questioned, “*no-one, including the mother of that girl, bothers to explain to people when the pregnancy miraculously disappears.*” Law enforcement agents are equally reluctant to implement the laws, as Mbuya Dzachi suggests below. Her analysis clearly pinpoints the interplay between sexuality and the broader social structures that shape everyday life. The image is now one of girls embracing a ‘privilege’ that arises from chaotic social structures, and they exercise their agency by having a backyard abortion,

Given the state of the nation at the moment, the police no longer have the energy to arrest at all. Even if they are to intervene, there is a lot of corruption. People are no

longer committed to their work because of the general challenges and hardships in our country.

Overall, the discourse of ‘negotiating connection’ is contrary to ‘a sense of loss among the elderly women, and their refusal to let go of what was’ that is evident in the ‘discourse of separation’. The women’s discourse does not simply reiterate ‘what was’, or attempt to comprehend emerging sexualities through their past/lived realities. Instead, there is a fundamental shift from representations that merely condemn the child for ‘bad morality’ toward deliberate efforts to analyse, debate and theorise around dominant discourses of marriage, sex and money, and abortion. What underlies this change in approach is the interviewees’ endeavour to make sense of emerging sexualities, and draw their meaning of contemporary Zimbabwe. From this point on, the interviewees reclaim their power and create a discursive bridge from where they re-negotiate their relationship to time – a position they occupy throughout the following pages of this chapter.

Discourses on personal sexuality

Contrary to the previous discourses, which ‘tack back and forward’ across the barrier of time theorising about young women’s bodies, the interviewees turn to engage with discourses around their own personal sexuality, as well as their belief that their knowledge of sexuality is ‘superior’. These discourses are powerful analytic tools for exploring the discourse of negotiating ‘connection’ further. As the interviewees interpret what it means to be a woman in present-day Zimbabwe, they derive meaning from their lived experiences of gender and sexuality across many different contexts. The women’s discourse constructs a contemporary Zimbabwean who is approximately sixty years of age, who has resisted socio-economic and political destabilisation. This is done by reflecting on their experiences of sexual pleasure, and sexual contexts, and their knowledge of sexual conventions and practices. These experiences also create space for the interviewees to explore the dominant discourses which deal with the meaning of living through a sexual and ageing body in an HIV/AIDS era. Taken together, their interview responses interpret the meaning of gender and embodiment, and also profile the tremendous change that the country has gone through. The interviewees draw on the ideological, developmental and material shifts that they have experienced or witnessed

over the years, and how these have shaped their engagement with their own sexuality in present-day Zimbabwe.

Recreation of the ‘herbs’ advice

Despite the fact that the elderly women’s advice on sexuality issues is marginalised and stigmatised by young women, the interviewees reconstruct themselves, not only as sexual beings, but as people who know how to prepare for sexual intercourse and derive pleasure from it. Mbuya Mataka, for instance, reveals interesting discourses about her knowledge of how to prepare her body ‘properly’ for sex, as well as how to have better sex. She proudly represents how she used herbs then, and she contends that currently young women know nothing about herbs, and are not properly prepared to be heterosexually attractive women,

Oh, I was a champion! I knew everything about these herbs...that they should be applied down there...so that it tightens and tastes better!

In the statement, “*they argue that women should insert some herbs down there so that it is not too loose*”, the pronoun ‘they’ indicates that Mbuya Mhiri distances herself from such a practice, yet it is clear that she is knowledgeable about how the herbs are used. An interesting debate emerges from this discourse because women like Mbuya Mhiri have reservations about the source of these herbs, especially in urban areas where she claims that “*no-one knows where they are from.*” Mbuya Zindoga represents how economically troubled women in Rusape, a small town in the eastern part of Zimbabwe, cash in on the neglect of the traditional role of the aunts. Mbuya Zindoga alleges that these women – as part of their survival strategy – operate from public toilets, where they swindle fairly young women into buying herbs that are meant to enhance sexual intercourse. Mbuya Zindoga adds that unsuspecting young women (including girls who are still in school) not only buy these herbs, but also conform to hegemonic beliefs of male pleasure. She asserts that “*young women argue that it is better for them to buy these herbs and please their husbands sexually.*” Mbuya Mhiri and Mbuya Zindoga condemn the practice from a medical perspective. They point out the gynaecological risks posed by the use of different herbs. Mbuya Mhiri claims that “*the uterus is so sensitive to all this dirty stuff*”, and Mbuya Zindoga agrees,

Those herbs that you insert remain inside...can damage the uterus because the herbs cannot be defecated. With time, the damaged uterus will start to bleed...it is these herbs that cause cancer among women.

Mbuya Mushandira speaks of the time when ‘they’ instructed her to squeeze ‘*mususu*’ leaves (an indigenous tree) and rub them on her private parts. She reports that the herbs made passing urine very sore. She also refers to the use of a small cloth (instead of herbs) that a woman had to insert into her private parts, and it would be pulled out and replaced as soon as it was saturated. The cloth absorbed bodily fluids throughout the day and kept the vagina dry. Based on her personal experience, Mbuya Mataka recommends that today’s women should improvise in the absence of paternal aunts, who would traditionally provide nieces with some herbs. She suggests that they should undo blanket threads, roll them into a ball and then insert the ball into the vagina. They should keep it there all day, and only to remove it at night when they bath,

It absorbs all the ‘water’ that makes a woman ‘wet’ the moment the husband tries to be intimate, before he even does nothing much. When a woman’s body easily responds to any stimulation, the vagina becomes ‘watery’ and loosens up which makes it ‘tasteless’...but we never had such problems...we knew quite well that a man does not want a ‘watery’ vagina.

The question “*do you still do that my grand/child?*” not only challenges my sexuality as a ‘young woman’, but it also offers insights into how seriously the interviewees take the discourse about their own knowledge of sexuality as ‘superior.’ Despite the diversity in the interviewees’ analyses, the ‘herbs’ advice reinforces the elderly women’s profound knowledge of the overall advantages of preparing a young woman to be a heterosexually attractive woman.

Embodiment: Reconstruction of womanhood

The interviewees do not merely shift from the discursive politics of condemnation and alienation, but they also reclaim their power and authority. They occupy a different space from where they analyse and theorise issues of gender and embodiment. They address a central question: “*Who then is a ‘real’ woman in contemporary Zimbabwe?*” The meaning of

'real' in the elderly women's discourses of sexuality involves an interpretation of gender and embodiment that reconstructs womanhood in response to the effects of socio-political change. Being a single Shona woman myself, the elderly women could not ignore such a figure that was present throughout the interview process. Mbuya Mhiri reads the image in front of her to demonstrate the meaning of 'real' womanhood,

Right now, I can see that you are a woman...your cheeks are round...it doesn't really matter whether your breasts and buttocks are huge or small...they are in good shape.

Mbuya Mhiri uses the phrase "*pameso pakaita sandairira*" in her representation of gender and embodiment, which is interpreted by Mbuya Zindoga as a full round face, one which is neither bony nor skeletal (*mabovo-mabovo*). Both women argue that 'if a girl engages sexually with boys/men at an early age, she develops some contours (*mabohlo-mabohlo*) on her face and tough cheek bones, and even her breasts do not develop fully.' It therefore becomes easy to tell that one is not a 'real' woman because of her breasts, which Mbuya Zindoga asserts "*are like 'planks', for they were squeezed and destroyed causing real damage.*" Thus a 'real' woman is identified by having a healthy-rounded body, but primarily by the shape of her cheek bones, buttocks and breasts. Mbuya Mhiri adds a moral discourse to her analysis of gender and embodiment,

Her breasts do not shape her dress around the chest area because they are flat, as if she was rained on. A person who is like that does not have morals at all.

However, the elderly women's discourse also depicts a dramatic change from the way 'real' womanhood was constructed in relation to the elongation of labia, then. Mbuya Zvitura, who observed that young women did not have elongated labia when she saw them bathing in the river, says "*they have absolutely nothing.*" Her remarks about the length of the labia after elongation clearly point to the contestation around elongation of the labia as a symbol of 'real' womanhood in contemporary Zimbabwe. She alleges that her neighbour divorced his wife because her labia majora were too long, "*She could literally tie them on her back because they were so long...my finger is shorter than what she had down there but she never had children.*" Mbuya Zvitura draws on her profound knowledge of the practice to clarify how long the labia should be,

Just enough to please your husband, otherwise, a woman fails to conceive.

Mbuya Zvitura speaks of another incident which reveals the tremendous changes in the meaning of this practice: “*You would better go if you don’t want me to cut the labia, because I cannot stay with an abnormal woman.*” This is contrary to the traditional view, where the absence of elongated labia was justification for a man to send his wife to her aunts for coaching. At the time, the husband asked the nurses for a pair of scissors in order to perform an instant ‘surgical procedure’ to ‘correct’ the ‘abnormal’ genitals. This story hints at how little the practice is followed now. His wife exercised her agency by denying him permission to violate her womanhood. The recognition that it is only women of her age, who still believe that a ‘real’ woman is someone with elongated labia, is substantiated by the vernacular metaphor “*kare hagari ari kare*”, which marks the passage of time. The reconstructed image is,

These days a ‘real’ woman is somebody who does not have them [elongated labia].

Mbuya Mataka’s conceptualisation of womanhood illustrates her engagement with the profound changes in the conventions surrounding sexual interaction, “*all that contemporary men want is ‘musingwi’ which does not have any taste or rhythm.*” The word ‘musingwi’ here refers to the vagina, and suggests that these men could not care less whether the vagina is ‘accessorised’ or not, all they want is sex. Thus the question “*kobvokobvo, hino zvaunouchira ndokuzodii?*” not only describes how bad sexual intercourse without ‘accessories’ is, but it also represents her own ‘superior’ knowledge of how to have sex. She sees the contemporary version of ‘sex’ as something inferior to what women of her generation could offer. Mbuya Mataka admits that the lack of elongated labia does not prevent a couple from conceiving, but her assertion, “*but if your man goes to a coached Shangani woman...he will definitely have something to play with*”, goes beyond the reproductive aspect of sexual intercourse to include the notion of pleasure as part of such encounters. She therefore claims that an ‘accessorised’ vagina makes a tremendous difference,

It is never the same as when one’s area of strength is her beauty, or the way she baths...there is more to it!

The responses to questions on what constitutes ‘real’ womanhood reveal how the interviewees frame themselves as emblems of ‘contemporary womanhood.’ They use their own sexuality to depict how they have resisted the socio-economic and political disruptions which characterise contemporary Zimbabwe. Mbuya Mere and Mbuya Zindoga frame ‘contemporary womanhood’ in the light of their having been ‘very brave’ and ‘strong’ right into old age. Likewise, Mbuya Ndari feels that their age group marks the end of an era of a ‘strong womanhood.’ Mbuya Dzachi interprets her own body to support this assertion,

If you look at me right now, my body as a woman shows that I am a healthy and strong mother. There are signs that I am ‘a person from long ago’, just from the way I do my work. These contemporary children cannot work as hard as I do, and when we work together, they even say to me, ‘This one is from long ago, don’t take her for granted.’

The elderly women revisit their pregnancies experiences to decipher their current physical strength. Pregnancy experiences are consensually represented through a phrase “*ndichibva pageja ndichindozvara*”, which describes how the interviewees literally gave birth straight from the field. This phrase implies that interviewees were very active during pregnancy, and it is this experience that Mbuya Ndari uses to justify her continuing strength and fitness in old age. Commenting on contemporary pregnancies, Mbuya Tugu is amazed by the many complications, for example, breech babies which require surgical intervention. This language is foreign to the midwives of her generation who used to deliver babies safely at home, without any complications. Mbuya Bvura emphasises the change in attitude nowadays, pregnant women are discouraged from carrying heavy objects yet in the past this was thought to develop strong bodies. What astonishes Mbuya Ndari, who reads the common complaint ‘*my pregnancy this or that*’ as whining, is the elderly women’s change of attitude towards pregnancy. Her statement below indicates that the elderly women themselves have forgotten how hard they worked when they were pregnant,

To my surprise, we are also caught up in this web...we even discourage our pregnant daughters from ploughing or carrying heavy stuff fearing that they might get sick.

Mbuya Tugu tracks her brain for possible explanations for the changes in the meaning of gender and embodiment, but the process leaves her puzzled and uncertain about the forces

behind the changes. As she expresses her concern about these chants, she points to the ideological and material shifts that Zimbabwe has gone through, *“I don’t really know where this is coming from...whether it is the prevailing situation in the country or what?”* While Mbuya Zvitura claims that *“if one sleeps [if one is not active] throughout her pregnancy, she should definitely encounter complications”* Mbuya Ndari, like Mbuya Bvura, finds meaning in the introduction and utilisation of family planning,

I believe that these pills that they now take are responsible for all these complications in women’s bodies. Of course we took the pills as well, but we never took them frequently...they start taking these pills when they are very young...that is why they have ill-health compared to us.

Mbuya Zindoga uses her body to indicate how unhealthy the contemporary utilisation of contraceptives is, *“this explains why the bodies of people of my generation are round and strong because we used to have our periods every month.”* In Mbuya Mhiri’s mind, today’s young women not only defy the Biblical instruction to give birth, but they also reject the long-held idea that a woman should continue bearing children until menopause, *“we just gave birth without taking any medicine, not what these contemporary women are doing!”* Mbuya Ngeno’s explanation for these changes suggests that women avoid becoming pregnant as they try to find a place for themselves in the new socio-economic and political dispensation. She says, *“They are probably no longer interested in child-bearing because of the difficulties that they now face in life.”* As Mbuya Zvitura puts it paradoxically, the economic challenges never deterred the women of her generation from having many children,

One continued to have babies...one after the other, no matter what.

Mbuya Shava supports the idea that child-bearing decisions are now framed in economic terms. She argues that *“it is now better because our children now decide on how many children they want to have.”* Long ago, women just conceived and gave birth as many times as possible, but later on they struggled to provide for all their children. Mbuya Bvura illustrates a shift in the power dynamics within marriages, now both partners openly discuss family planning, *“The wife freely takes the pills because the husband approves of it...he even recommends it!”* Mbuya Mere confirms this observation, *“Women now openly take the pills with no fear of being caught by their husbands, who are usually in agreement.”* Her statement

attests to the mutual openness of the discourse around family planning within contemporary marriages. Underlying these analyses is the perception that as the marriages move away from cultural conventions of the past, contemporary women enjoy some degree of autonomy and power within unions. However, the claim “*we used to hide those pills during our time*” suggests a victory over past patriarchal resistance to family planning as Mbuya Mere took the pills against her husband’s wishes.

Elderly women on HIV/AIDS

The analysis of gender and sexuality would be incomplete without exploring these women’s experiences, knowledge and perceptions of HIV/AIDS. Their representations of themselves as sexual beings take this analysis to narratives that construct the body as a transmitter of diseases. Although Mbuya Mere emphasises the absence of AIDS during her motherhood, she admits that there were sexually transmitted infections long ago, “*there was no...eh...this AIDS of yours long ago...there was one called ‘yamatarirana’...they said it caused some pimples on the genitals.*” The different names that this generation of women uses for these infections, is striking. Like Mbuya Dzachi and Mbuya Bvura, Mbuya Mhiri recalls that a common infection was termed “*chizonono or siki – meaning wounds that developed down there.*” Mbuya Nguvo introduces the abbreviation VD, which stands for Venereal Diseases, which also indicates the institutionalisation of stigma a long time ago,

There were rooms written VD at the hospital that were set aside for infected people. Those patients also wore clothes labelled VD meaning that they had ‘siki’.

The AIDS discourse marks the passage of time, for example, Mbuya Zvitura refers to “*siki iya yakare*”, which loosely translated means ‘infections from long ago’. She talks of her personal experience with ‘*siki yakare*’ in a way that distinguishes these infections from the contemporary ones. Her narrative “*I remember there was this STD that caused sores on one’s genitals...there was medication for that as well...not what is happening these days*” suggests that ‘infections from long ago’ were curable – a claim with which Mbuya Mere agrees. Mbuya Dzachi alleges that the infections were not fatal, and those who died from ‘*siki*’ would have kept it a secret until they were gravely ill. Again, Mbuya Zvitura draws on her personal experience to highlight that there were no condoms long ago, and she also makes the claim that infected people recovered after receiving medical attention,

There was nothing for protection long ago...I remember I once had 'siki iya yakare' after my husband infected me, but it cleared when we received treatment at the clinic. All infected people simply went to the clinic, and the medication worked because it was really strong.

Mbuya Nguvo and Mbuya Mere's use of the pronoun 'they' distances the pair from sexually transmitted infections. Mbuya Nzimbe recounts how she has been free from such infections right into widowhood, *"I never had any infections ever since I got married up until my husband's death!"* Mbuya Mataka also claims that she was never infected with STDs throughout her sexual life. Mbuya Rava proudly declares, *"Some of us do not have AIDS"*, and Mbuya Zvitura asserts that women of her generation escaped because *"they no longer run around."* The majority of interviewees consider their age group 'an AIDS free generation.' Mbuya Mere concludes that the aged die from diseases believed to be natural, *"yes, diseases from God, not that one, it is for the young who are restless."* The stigma attached to HIV/AIDS, especially when the aged and widowed are infected, whom society presumes to be asexual, is expressed,

Mbuya Rava: It would be embarrassing if you were to find me sleeping helplessly next to the fire. Everyone would be pointing fingers at me wondering where and how I contracted the disease at this age. Besides, HIV only emerged after I had finished giving birth and was already widowed.

Mbuya Nzimbe: If I get sick from 'the disease' I am purely to blame considering that I am a widow.

The interviewees proudly embrace widowhood and old age/menopause as spaces where they have found closure to their sexual life. Mbuya Zvitura asserts that not a single man has entered her bodily space since the time of her divorce. She reads her body and that of women of her generation as healthy *"look at me, I am very healthy...elders are even growing stronger each day."* Mbuya Nzimbe also embraces the pleasure of widowhood in this HIV/AIDS era, and she says, *"I have never had health related problems ever since my husband passed away...I am very strong."* The 'AIDS free generation label' also occurs in Mbuya Ngeno's narrative about how she *"escaped these contemporary diseases"* when she

separated from her abusive husband. The elderly women's narratives reveal that they are a knowledgeable group, for their vocabulary depicts that they too are vulnerable to be infected with HIV, as Mbuya Mere's words show,

If you do it, you will be infected, for real! I am not lying...if you sleep around...you contract the infection.

The label, 'AIDS free generation', does not prevent the elderly women from analysing the effect that HIV/AIDS has had on their families. Mbuya Zvitura reflects on the detrimental effects, "*this disease is killing our children, and it is causing havoc, making the situation different from what we went through.*" Mbuya Nguvo underlines the magnitude of the AIDS epidemic by representing profound demographic shifts, "*they now say everyone who dies, it is AIDS... it is wiping out our children, our children are perishing, for real!*" Mbuya Mere's remark "*contemporary people just die from AIDS*" implies that HIV/AIDS has become part of everyday life. Nonetheless, the elderly women frame HIV/AIDS as a reality that continually stirs up great fear and bewilderment. They express their concern through phrases like, "*As for this one...But this recent one...AIDS! This one is problematic to tell the truth! This disease is just too much...I have surrendered.*" The phrases lead this analysis to transcript narratives that frame HIV/AIDS as a medical issue. Mbuya Zvitura's narrative below points to the challenges that the pandemic presents the medical fraternity with because there is no cure,

Of course, there are pills for AIDS, but the pills do not make any difference because most of the people who are infected never get better...actually, they die. We fail to understand at all where this 'disease', which does not respond to any form of medication, came from.

Mbuya Rava assumes that "*maybe infected people, who take some pills, are given fake ones.*" The lack of a cure forces Mbuya Tugu to reflect, how in the past, people infected with sexually transmitted diseases were treated and responded well to medication which is not the case 'now'. Mbuya Nguvo challenges the medical fraternity by asking: "*Can't they find cure in this whole world?*" However, Mbuya Mere is pessimistic about the impact of the pandemic on maternal care "*if she contracts it and conceives she won't survive...I swear to God.*"

Mbuya Nzimbe shows her knowledge of medical advances as she refers to a widespread HIV-prevention method,

I am told that these days, if someone is pregnant, she takes some pills so that the child is protected from diseases that the mother could have.

That individual knowledge, and conceptualisations of the HIV/AIDS discourse vary, also depends on past and present experiences and observations. The history of sexually transmitted infections, which elderly women trace through their sexual bodies, and the challenge that AIDS creates for the medical fraternity, distinguish between 'then and now'. Their representations of HIV/AIDS portray 'then' as a period of medical abundance, and 'now' as a period of unquestionable distress and disquiet. That notwithstanding, sex post-menopause is rendered less important as women become preoccupied with the escalation of HIV/AIDS and the gendered politics of a failing political economy. Representations of the sexual body reveal the challenges that the discourses of HIV/AIDS create for the nation, and elderly women's interpretations of their sexual and gendered lives suggest how to negotiate with the realities of 'being' in such a complex environment.

Chapter conclusion

The elderly women refer to two powerful relationships to time that distinguish 'then' from 'now'. As the chapter progresses, these relationships to time shift from a sense of loss, condemnation and alienation to a more optimistic position from which they negotiate with the meaning of 'being' in contemporary Zimbabwe. This negotiation with time happens discursively, but it is also performative as it engages with me as a 'young' Shona woman in a way that depicts how the politics of gender and sexuality have evolved over the years. The process of negotiating contemporary Zimbabwean identity is, in part, guided by a shift from traditional expectations of marriage and procreation as women either delay marriage or decline to marry in a time of economic want. This latter representation suggests that although still gendered, young women now exercise control over their sexual bodies. Nevertheless, living through a gendered body in present-day Zimbabwe is about negotiating with the complex notions of respectability that characterised colonial Zimbabwe (see Gaidzanwa, 1995; Hungwe, 2006). The battle over respectability flows largely from the dominant

perception that young women do not in any way conform to the normative scripts of gender and sexuality, especially the norms of ‘proper’ womanhood.

Young women in contemporary Zimbabwe are depicted as beings that resist the deeply entrenched practice of labia elongation, which they perceive as ‘hegemonic’. It is against this background that the elderly women suggest that the concept ‘real’ in the phrase ‘real womanhood’ has shifted to other dimensions of the gendered body. These include outward beauty, educational background and economic muscle – factors that add value to marriage for women living in a nation with great economic instability. Closely related to these factors is the way the interviewees point to ideological shifts in the use of the label, ‘*mapfumbidzakumwe*’, which was previously attached to a woman based on her contribution to her in-laws’ income upon marriage. The label is also linked to transcript narratives that mark ‘real women’ in ways that both reconstruct womanhood and destabilise manhood. Mbuya Vatsa alleges, “*Gone are the days when people used to prefer having sons so that the clan name would be extended. Surely, that was then, it is now a thing of the past.*” This statement indicates a shift from long-standing patriarchal pride in fathering sons in order to ensure the survival of the clan name (see Kambarami, 2006). The change also resonates with the way women of the interviewees’ generation “resisted and challenged a patriarchal order in ways that have translated into higher educational and economic status for their daughters and granddaughters” (Wells, 2003:102) in contemporary Zimbabwe. As a result, the discourse of an inherently ‘privileged or superior’ man is challenged.

The above analyses offer insights into the interviewees’ engagement with emerging sexualities in ways that challenge men’s sexual prowess. The elderly women suggest that women in rural Zimbabwe constantly negotiate with the politics that emerge as the volatile economic landscape affects marriage patterns, especially the practice of *lobola*. This claim is supported by the findings of a study conducted in Kissi and Dar-es-Salaam, which uncovered low self-esteem among married men after the socio-economic realities of East Africa had undermined their ability to meet their social obligations (Silberschmidt, 2004:240). These findings also support the claim that institutions, such as the economy of a nation, shape the politics of sexuality. Hyde (1990:38) demonstrates the connection between “the nature and structure of the economy and patterns of marriage and childbearing.” For instance, she theorises that a high unemployment rate raises questions of how to provide for the family when a man has no income, “men are understandably reluctant to marry” (ibid: 38). The

image becomes that of Zimbabwean women exercising agency in ways that affect their sexual and reproductive bodies because they enjoy some degree of autonomy within relationships (see Wells, 2003:107), especially over safe sex and family planning matters.

Overall, these elderly women use their constant struggle for recognition as an analytic lens through which they represent their own 'superior' knowledge of sexuality and Zimbabwe as a nation. They do not simply 'dramatise' their lived experiences of gender and sexuality, which also include personal observations, but their stories are powerful representations which mark the passage of time. As they analyse the impact the passage of time has had on contemporary sexualities, they describe how they negotiate complex identities expressed through the statement "*I am the mother, grandmother, aunt...everything*", which disregards the stigmatisation and alienation of their advice and their way of life by the younger generation. These gendered identities also mirror a multiplicity of roles that ordinary Zimbabweans living in a crisis-ridden nation often strive to fulfil. Representations of the way gendered bodies negotiate for space in contemporary Zimbabwe create a discursive thread that holds the interviewees' narratives of gender and embodiment together. As such, the elderly women embody the impact shifting economic and socio-political landscapes have had on gender and sexual discourses and the project of nationhood in this flag democracy.

Chapter 8: Discussion of Findings

This analytic discussion integrates the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 with the findings presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 as a way into an in-depth understanding of what the thesis has uncovered. Reflecting on the theoretical, contextual and analytic chapters, I create a set of arguments about what I have found that resonates with both the main research question and the literature. The chapter deals with questions around the meaning of connecting representations of women's bodies and sexualities with the idea of re-seeing the story of a nation. These questions take discourses of gender and sexuality that emerge from elderly women's life stories as a powerful tool with which to imagine, and represent ways of 'being Zimbabwean'. In the process of integrating the scholarly literature and the elderly women's discourses, I bring to light the diverse ways in which the women rehearse their relationship to the nation. I identify the dominant ideas on the nation-sexuality battle that have emerged in the preceding chapters, and also show how these discourses help one understand the notion of nationhood in Zimbabwe.

Dominant discourses connecting women's experiences to literature

The scholars engaged with in Chapters 2 and 3 subscribe to the theorisation that if one pays serious attention to representations of experience, one will gain insight into the meaning of 'being' within a nation. Although these scholars agree that it is possible to hear nationhood through listening to the material about gender and sexuality, their analyses suggest that there are different ways of accessing the connection between nation, gender and sexual discourses. As discussed predominantly in Chapter 2, the dominant scholars analyse a wide range of material about knowledge(s) of sexuality, the tradition/culture divide (Lewis, 2011; see also Ratele, 2007; Tamale 2008; Kolawole, 2004), discourses of law (see Tamale, and Bennett, 2011), policy battles and change (Posel, 2011), and the politics of heteronormativity (Steyn, and van Zyl, 2009; Phillips, 2011&2004; Epprecht, 2010). For instance, Posel (2011:130) reveals how in the wake of HIV/AIDS sexual discourses became intimately linked with questions of nationalism/nationhood, a connection that had a huge influence on the creation of 'South Africa' post-1994. From the outset, the nation/sexuality battle explored by the scholars above, often through different zones of theorising, has been a central theoretical idea that inspired me to listen to Zimbabwean women in order to ascertain how the discourses of

nationhood might be reflected through representations of women's bodies, especially their sexual and gendered lives.

This research, as highlighted at the end of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, pays attention to the theoretical challenges posed by the category 'women' in debates on gender and sexuality. Scholarship frames the elderly women as a group of people whose experiences of gender and sexuality are rarely explored by researchers (Orner, 2007; see also Degnen, 2007) both theoretically and empirically. As such, research that targets representations of elderly women's lived experiences allows one to listen to stories of nationhood as a complex process through which Zimbabwe was formed.

It is vital to connect this analytic discussion with insights drawn from the idea of 're-seeing and re-imagining' the nation. The central question here interrogates what the process of 're-seeing' the nation entails: how one can remap a nation through listening to the elderly women's lived realities; what is it that one should specifically listen for that allows one to hear something about 'being Zimbabwean' from such narratives? These questions introduce the dominant themes that emerged as I listened to the elderly women's narratives of gender and sexuality. Henceforth, the chapter moves into a complex space where I engage with what I established when I listened to elderly women's lived experiences in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe.

The first theme is about the elderly women's constant negotiation with change, and it engages with their discourses of time which they explore through their realities of 'then and now'. The preceding theme leads this analysis straight into elderly women's ideas on the regulation of gender and sexuality 'now', the meaning of knowledge about sexuality, and the meaning of violence. Altogether, these thematic spaces serve as analytic lenses through which the elderly women re-imagine and represent the meaning of 'being Zimbabwean' – albeit in very complex ways.

Reading nationhood through discourses of time

This thematic area reveals what I have learnt about the difference between 'then and now' from listening to the elderly women's discourses. 'Then and now' is a discourse about the passage of time particularly located in Chapter 7, but it also appears in Chapter 5 and Chapter

6. The elderly women use this discourse to make sense of emerging sexualities as they negotiate with change in contemporary Zimbabwe. Time, “the unfolding and emergence of the new” (Grosz, 2000:1018) figuratively represents how sexuality discourses have responded to a changing socio-political framework. The women’s analyses move back and forth across time creating a discursive space for engaging with gendered politics of the body in Zimbabwe. The analytic framework corresponds to Foucault’s (1972) recognition that “social meanings are continuously negotiated and contested through language and discourse” (see Baxter, 2003:23-4). The exploration of ‘then and now’ is not simply the comparison of past and present – ‘that was then, this is now’ – which rehashes the ‘tradition’ versus ‘modernity’ polarity. Rather, the elderly women’s engagement with ‘now’ is continually interacting with ‘then’. Flowing from the negotiation with time are insightful discourses that help in analysing the elderly women’s relationship to the meaning of ‘being Zimbabwean’. Given that representations of that which the elderly women deeply value or despise about ‘now’ are in negotiation with ‘then’ all the time, their narratives of ‘then and now’ function as a discursive tool for re-imagining how nationhood has evolved in Zimbabwe over the decades.

None of the nineteen elderly women have bought in any way into the dominant notion of hegemonic nationality for current Zimbabwe, that ‘now is quintessentially better than then’. Their narratives continuously present many ways in which ‘now is not better than then’. For instance, ‘now’ is not better than ‘then’ simply because of the escalation of poverty and the ravages of HIV. This observation is also evident in the theoretical and contextual chapters where scholars (Posel, 2011; Bennett and Reddy 2007; Jackson, 2000; McFadden, 1992) tackle the nation/sexuality battle in relation to the HIV/AIDS pandemic which is ravaging post-colonial Africa. These scholars point out the mutual relationship between HIV/AIDS, economic crisis and the escalation of poverty (Schoepf, 2004:15; McFadden, 1992:192) and the adverse impact these discourses have on women and their sexuality (Jackson, 2000). In the wake of HIV/AIDS and shifting economic and material circumstances, representations of gendered bodies create discursive metaphors about the ways in which the post-colonial state grapples with the realities of ‘now’ (see Bakare-Yusuf, 2011:117).

In addition, ‘now’ is not better than ‘then’ because of the way in which the elderly women understand the loss of respect for certain gendered and cultural norms. Although some researchers are likely to treat the elderly women’s analyses as nostalgia for their youth, I find

their narratives very illuminating. In what are supposed to be simple life stories, the elderly women talk about a relationship to being gendered and living a sexuality which they value very deeply, and to dismiss that would be to erase something about what it has taken to create nationhood in Zimbabwe. Beyond the simple argument that the elderly women value ‘then’ deeply, I find their narratives illuminating in terms of ideas of the regulation of gender, the meaning of knowledge(s) about sexuality, and ideas about the meaning of violence and war – through which the notion of nationhood in Zimbabwe is read and articulated.

Ideas on regulation of gender and sexuality ‘now’

Dominant scholars such as Lewis, (2011); Phillips, (2004); Epprecht, (2010&2009); Bennett, (2011); and Tamale (2011&2005) view the regulation of gender and sexuality as intrinsic to nation-building. These scholars clearly depict how the legal institutions in many post-colonial African nations shape sexuality discourses through the laws governing the politics of heteronormativity. The legal framework is often deployed by the state so that “laws become mechanisms of social control which can lead to punishments for engaging in acts categorised as illegitimate” (Hyde, 1990:39). Thus the regulation of gender and sexuality reflects dominant ideologies prevailing in a nation where those in power “define the terms for the community as a whole” (Hartsock, 2004:288). For example, the politics of abortion in Zimbabwe functions as lenses through which researchers (see Tichagwa, 1998; Mashamba, and Robson, 2002) explore the ideas on regulation of gender and sexuality ‘now’. The state through the legislation on abortion controls the circumstances under which a woman can terminate pregnancy. It is through this regulation of gender and sexuality that gendered citizens begin to imagine the reality of ‘being Zimbabwean’ as they internalise or resist nationalist discourses (see Tichagwa, 1998).

Emerging out of the contextual chapter is a useful discussion on the impact of government action (Operation Murambatsvina in particular) and HIV/AIDS on the social realities of women and on Zimbabwe in the 21st century. These discourses allude to the ways in which contemporary Zimbabwean state is seeking to redefine the nation through the regulation of sexuality. Eradicating ‘unruly’ elements in the ‘clean-up’ process becomes one way in which this ‘new’ discourse of the nation is asserted and gendered bodies re-inscribed in the national landscape. The disruption caused by the ‘clean-up’ operation exposes how Zimbabwe’s leaders are seeking to create a discourse of the Zimbabwean nation as a modern, controlled

and civilized place. The process of constructing Zimbabwe as a 'nation', like Foucault (1978, translated in 1990) alludes to, heavily revolves around patrols and surveillance of the body by the state. The regulation of gender and sexuality 'now' has very real consequences which can easily impinge on women's human rights and undermine the discursive nature of identity construction and maintenance in a state struggling to achieve democracy.

Correspondingly, the language that the elderly women use throughout interview transcripts suggests that 'being Zimbabwean' is a constant battle that women fight as they strive to live through gendered and sexualised bodies in a nation where such bodies are policed. Their talk about regulation does not reference national laws or policies, rather, it places emphasis on the loss of their own power and political standing as people who could play a strong role in the regulation of gender and sexuality.

At the core of the elderly women's narratives is the argument that the intervention of the state has marginalised their relevance to the project of regulation. This is a project in which their ideas about being gendered are centred on the loss of their own sense of relevance to 'being Zimbabwean', and often they compensate by working with extremely powerful and complex narratives of 'being Shona'. The women's vocabulary of 'being Shona', for instance, reveals that they deeply regret the way in which 'being Shona' is no longer possible for younger women living in 'the now'. They represent their lived realities as different from what people of my generation – 'young women' – have and continue to experience, which further complicates the interviewees' understanding of 'being Zimbabwean'. What the elderly women want is not a return to 'tradition', but they want to be recognised so that they connect to the notion of nationhood 'now'. That connection allows the elderly women to engage in the project of regulating sexualities in contemporary Zimbabwe, not simply as a repressive project, but as a project of liberation that creates hope for the possibility of a next generation of Zimbabweans.

The preceding paragraph suggests that the elderly women's interest in identity and experience is very rich and is articulated through the meaning they attach to 'being Shona', but which is not easily connected to their understanding of being in this country. The more people lose hope in the project of the nation the more they invest in a different version of nationhood. The impression that one gets is that if the elderly women cannot be Zimbabwean, they can at least be Shona, and that becomes their nationhood which some (in the north) would call

‘ethnicity’. It could be said that the elderly women are much more interested in their identity as Shona than they are in ‘being Zimbabwean’ – partly because the focus of this thesis is on Shona women. Reading Zimbabwe through a constructed Shona identity accords with Foucault’s (1984) theorisation that “one critical site of struggle to determine dominant social meanings is the subjectivity or socially constructed identity of the individual” (see Baxter, 2003:25). It is clearly discernible that beyond mapping the social constructedness of gendered identities in Zimbabwe, the interviewees’ individual trajectories reveal the discursiveness of the women’s social relationships as well as the meanings they attach to their gendered engagement with the state.

Meaning of knowledge(s) about sexuality

This section brings the discussion to the material on access to knowledge about sexualities as an analytic position from which one could see the meaning of nationhood. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 reveals that feminist scholars adopt diverse ways of theorising, interpreting and representing the meaning of knowledge about sexuality in post-colonial Africa. These theorisations have to do with how the post-colonial state patrols gendered bodies and sexualities as part of its nation-building project. The elderly women collectively speak about the ways in which a post-colonial hegemonic patriarchy, similar to a racialised colonial patriarchy, affects their lives. They speak about their utter marginalisation within the nation and the reinforcement of the expectation that they should only contribute as reproductive beings. The elderly women also talk about the meaning of knowledge about sexuality, albeit in relation to their loss of power and authority, and their subsequent alienation from the processes of nationhood in Zimbabwe – a nation in which they have battled for recognition all their lives. The notion of nationhood ‘now’ becomes a battle in which these elderly women negotiate the loss of respect for certain gendered and cultural norms such as the traditional coaching system that has tremendously been disrupted over the years (see Mashamba, and Robinson, 2002:275).

The elderly women reclaim their power and create a discursive bridge from where they re-negotiate their relationship to ‘now’, irrespective of the fact that the younger generation stigmatises their knowledge(s) and advice about sexuality. Their discourse disregards the sense of alienation to nationhood created by the passage of time that separates them from ‘now’. In essence, the elderly women emerge as embodiments of the ‘real Zimbabwean

woman' whose personal experiences and observations of gender and sexuality are different from what is happening 'now'. Juxtaposing their sexualities with those of young women, the elderly women construct an image of a 'contemporary Zimbabwean' who is approximately sixty years of age, and who has resisted socio-economic and political destabilisation. They frame themselves as senior citizens who not only embody what 'real womanhood' is, but who hold superior knowledge about how to have sex and how to live through a gendered body now. Hence, the elderly women return to their traditional role as coaches who are capable of preparing a heterosexually attractive woman, who is equally able to discern what constitutes ritual, what constitutes pleasure and what constitutes opportunity. The knowledge that the elderly women hold about what constitutes ritual among the Shona is deeply embedded in experiences of negotiating a set of regulations which defined and controlled their sexuality at puberty, and beyond.

Despite the asexual status imposed on them by society (see Orner, 2007), the meaning of 'being Zimbabwean' is drawn partly from the elderly women's representations of themselves as sexual beings who hold superior knowledge about what constitutes pleasure. The elderly women also see themselves as senior citizens, who hold very dense knowledge about sexuality, and about Zimbabwe which they have accumulated over many years. They claim superior knowledge about how to live through a gendered body within shifting economic and socio-political landscapes: knowledge(s) which today's young women, who are located in such complex environments, could take advantage of if they are to derive pleasure from sexual relationships.

The discourses that frame the elderly women's knowledge(s) about sexuality as superior create a lens for reading the nation/sexuality battle in present-day Zimbabwe, especially the meaning of nationhood as articulated through discourses of 'emerging sexualities'. The elderly women place emphasis on metaphors such as '*kare hagari ari kare*' which besides marking the passage of time also illuminate their own knowledge about how conceptualisations of sexuality have changed tremendously over the years. The repeated referencing of these metaphors throughout the analytic chapters is "a way of making sense of experience, and of expressing and conveying its meaning" (Punch, 2005:218). When the 'knowledges about sexuality', which appear in the discourses of elderly women's own lived experiences of gender and sexuality in Zimbabwe, are examined, they expose the meanings

attached to sexualities in a country where the notion of nationhood has gone through drastic change in the last decades.

Meaning of violence – war, transition and motherhood

The last theme is one in which I engage with what the feminist theorists and the elderly women say about understanding violence as critical to the meaning of nationhood. The fight about security is a dominant discourse explored by many post-colonial feminist scholars (Lahiri, 2011; Bennett, 2010; Ayiera, 2010; Motsei, 2007; Omarjee, 2008; Njovana, and Watts, 1996) in their analyses of the connection between the dynamics of gender and sexuality and the nation in Africa. The material on ‘the fight about security’ illuminates how conservative state frameworks on contraception, abortion and marriage reinforce gender-based violence with drastic effects on women’s sexual bodies and rights (see Njovana, and Watts, 1996). Thus African-focused scholars use ‘the fight about security’ to depict how the state institutionalises power-based relations that are gendered (McClintock, 1994:298) and often violent (McClintock, 1993:61). The elderly women’s narratives reveal the diverse ways in which they have wrestled with issues of security within and outside the home in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. Their transcript narratives support the theorisations of the feminist scholars mentioned above.

Nevertheless, it is important to take into account that the main violence which the elderly women are particularly interested in is/was the war. It is in the discussion of the Chimurenga War and transition to independence that the meaning of motherhood emerges. Similarly, the discourse of motherhood is central to feminist analyses of the nation-sexuality battle, particularly theories about women as ‘mothers of the nation’ (see Ranchod-Nilsson, and Tétréault, 2000: 41). The elderly women talk about the war through discourses of motherhood not in relation to a project of the nation but much more in relation to the project of anxiety, loss, stress and worry. They emerge as people for whom motherhood in the context of Chimurenga War was more important than discourses on the freedom fighters or becoming a new nation. Motherhood battles – especially reflections on pregnancy and child-birth experiences – mirror the gendered ways in which women were connected to the nation over the years. Therefore women’s discourse resonates with the literature (see Barnes, 2007; Lyons, 2004) that points to the battles for recognition that gendered and sexualised ‘citizens’ constantly fought during the transition from colonial to independent Zimbabwe.

Representations of the interviewees' bodies at motherhood (as at girlhood and old age) tell the story of nationhood in Zimbabwe as complex processes through which gendered citizens have and continue to navigate shifting contours of the post-flag democracy. All the elderly women work with very clear narratives in which the meaning of the war of liberation is very much part of a hegemonic story of how Zimbabwe was formed. In opposition to the nationalist narrative that praises the war for giving birth to the 'new nation', the elderly women adopt the war of liberation as a discursive lens through which they re-imagine their connection to the state as gendered in various ways. The interviewees' discourses of the war add value to the national story of Zimbabwe by deconstructing the hegemonic nationalist narrative through which the narratives of 'great men' often come to represent the narrative of 'the nation'.

Chapter conclusion

The process of revisiting dominant feminist scholars' engagement with the politics of gender and sexuality has exposed me once more to insightful theorisations and discussions about how women are implicated in gendered nationhood discourses (McClintock, 1993&1995) as the post-colonial state patrols their bodies and sexualities. Bearing these theorisations in mind, I have reflected on the 'how and why' I chose to listen to the elderly women's gendered experiences of sexuality in rural Zimbabwe. I have uncovered that it is possible to hear the meaning of nationhood through listening to narratives of such women's lived realities. That notwithstanding, this discussion comes to a theoretical conclusion that the elderly women's talk about gender and sexual discourses reveals processes of nationhood, and the politics of alienation to nationhood in present-day Zimbabwe.

On reaching this theoretical conclusion, I am very conscious of the idea that hearing nationhood through listening to these women's discourses in the context of Zimbabwe is not a simple and straight forward process, theoretically or empirically. It is very complicated for there are lots of contradictions and differences in the elderly women's transcript narratives, and lots of negotiation with 'being Zimbabwean'. What this means is that nationhood is being processed contrary to oversimplified nationalist narratives of Zimbabwe such as: 'we have achieved the nation; we are the nation; Zimbabwean women and men are like this; or this is

who we are.’ When one listens carefully to these elderly women, there is no certainty about the meaning of nationhood to the extent that one cannot make any easy assumptions. Nevertheless, if the theorisation is approached from a policy, rights or even gender-based violence perspective as feminist scholarship does, one can certainly make various claims about the connection between hearing discourses of gender and sexuality and hearing about ‘being’ in a nation.

The absence of certainty deconstructs the hegemonic notion of nationhood, and is in itself a major theoretical finding of this research. The notion of uncertainty makes it difficult to claim that there is a clear statement of Zimbabwean identity that flows from listening to the elderly women; rather, there are very complex relationships of anxiety, loss, power and possibilities. Certainly, there are some clear statements about a possible Shona identity which are in contestation between them because the elderly women do not all agree. The image of the national project emerging from the elderly women’s talk is one from which there is a fairly clear and well-articulated alienation. As observed earlier, the elderly women do not oversimplify constructions and representations of the Zimbabwean identity. ‘Zimbabweanness’ in this context is constantly under their theorisation of the relationships between ‘then’ and ‘now.’ Thirty-two years after independence, women who have lived under colonial administration, through the Chimurenga War, the first years of independence and the subsequent socio-political volatility, do not have a clear version of the birth of the nation. This, in fact, makes them experts on what it means to understand nationhood as a process rather than an institutionalisation.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This chapter retraces the entire research journey, as I reflect critically on the ideological, methodological and analytic stages the thesis has gone through. It is through the same process that I review theoretical and empirically-based contributions that this research on the elderly women has made to the study of gender, sexuality and nationhood in a post-colonial setting. I also present conceptual and methodological limitations that threatened the very basis of this study and how I worked around some of them as the research unfolded. This chapter ends the thesis by restating the major finding and theoretical conclusion.

Drawing on Naples (2003:13), the central research question explored in this thesis is “personally, politically and academically significant” to the discourses of sexuality and nationhood, and the discipline of Gender studies as a whole. Critical reflection on the research journey reveals that the thesis was born, in part, from my identity as a ‘young Shona woman’ with a keen interest in how sexuality has been conceptualised, experienced and reconceptualised among my own people. My subjective positionality pushed me to explore questions of gender and sexuality with a critical eye, a process that has highlighted theoretical and conceptual gaps that other feminist scholars have identified. Among these are scholars who have dealt with the methodological complexities of adopting sexuality as a central research topic in Zimbabwe (Mupotsa, and Mhishi, 2008; Kambarami, 2006; Gaidzanwa, 2001; and Zinanga, 1996); and in other African countries (Gune, and Manuel, 2011; and Tamale, 2005). Taking inspiration from feminist theorisations on embodied experiences of sexuality as discursive lenses for analysing the notion of nationhood, I have paid attention to the elderly women’s experiences of gender and sexuality lived within lives which span colonial and post-colonial time in Zimbabwe.

Using chronological order as a way of mapping and representing elderly women’s lived experiences, the thesis reflects on nineteen elderly women’s narratives of how they have experienced socio-political change and the politics of gender and sexuality in Zimbabwe. The thesis illuminates how the elderly women became nationalised during different stages of building the nation, which coincided with their transition from girlhood through womanhood to motherhood/wifehood and old age. ‘Being Zimbabwean’ at each transition phase meant constant negotiations with patriarchal families and complex structures of the colonial and

post-colonial nations. Consequently, the thesis has paid serious attention to discourses of ‘then and now’ which capture nationhood battles that women fought through gendered access to education opportunities, access to patrolled bodies, motherhood battles during and after the war, and the socio-political realities of contemporary Zimbabwe. The thesis reconceptualises the notion of nationhood through a language that reflects the complexities of growing up under a colonial administration, as well as the meaning of living and growing old in present-day Zimbabwe. It has emerged that these women, who have experienced and witnessed tremendous shifts in socio-economic conditions and the political landscape, embody the politics of gender and sexuality in ways which enable researchers to see processes of nationhood in post-colonial Zimbabwe. For the elderly women, the notion of nationhood means constantly embracing their identity as grandmothers in order to make sense of the socio-political and economic dilemmas that characterise the process of building this post-colonial state. The project of nation-building in Zimbabwe becomes a process where the elderly women embody the multiple identities and roles that ordinary citizens continuously strive to fulfil as they navigate the contours of a crisis-ridden nation.

The analysis of their lived experiences also illustrates that the elderly women embody diverse nation-building processes as they negotiate a pre-determined set of regulations which patrol their sexualities. For instance, the notion of ‘emerging sexualities’ provides a discursive context depicting how the state regulates women’s bodies through legislation that criminalises abortion. The legal discourse supports the theorisation that as women are implicated in nation-building processes, their bodies and sexualities clearly distinguish legitimate notions of nationhood from those that are illegitimate. The symbolic deployment of women’s bodies is not only central to interpretations of nationhood, but it simultaneously redefines sexuality in view of the changing socio-political landscapes and the subsequent impact the escalation of poverty and HIV/AIDS has had on women in Zimbabwe. Besides re-echoing constructions of “sexuality as a life-long experience that is not confined to the biological clock of reproduction” (Esiet, 2007: xvi), post-menopausal images of elderly women as sexual beings, who are equally prone to what they perceive as contemporary infections, expose the complexities of living through a gendered, sexual and ageing body in Zimbabwe.

While some of the materials presented in this thesis identify practices that have, and that continue to shape gender and sexuality discourses in Zimbabwe and other post-colonial

nations, the thesis tries as far as possible to avoid reproducing the image of women as subordinates within a gendered relational hierarchy. Scholars, who work tirelessly with the discourse of sexuality to ensure that the empowering aspects of being gendered as a woman, (see Magubane, 2001:817) have been central to this thesis. In keeping with the feminist inclination towards female agency, particular focus has been on how elderly women have successfully navigated and challenged hierarchical power structures in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. The notion of agency is clearly significant in the analytic chapters where the interviewees' experiences interrogate long-standing patriarchal ideologies that frame women as sexually inferior and subordinate to men. Women are equal partners in a heterosexual relationship, who exercise their agency by responding to sexual intercourse in a fulfilling way. As the interviewees voice positions as sexual subjects of their own lives and breadwinners or food producers within their families, I discern gender power through accounts of times of great shift and transformation. The discourse of women's resistance to domination by men accords with the literature on how African-focused researchers frequently draw inspiration from historically embedded female agency and 'early' resistance to hegemonic colonial ideologies. Examples of such agency include the remarkable work of "Nehanda of Zimbabwe, Nzinga of Angola, and Nana Asantewa of Ghana – individual giants who transformed their societies" (Kolawole, 2004:254). The discourse of agency doubles as an analytic lens through which feminist researchers explore and deconstruct the enforced gendered identities and sexuality in post-colonial Africa.

The thesis in many ways shapes into a testimony that enriches our understanding of the experience of 'being Zimbabwean'. As the thesis focuses on the realities apparent in a particular rural locale, it offers the elderly women's stories influenced by the politics of that locale as well as individual life trajectories, as a way of re-writing the history of Zimbabwe. Throughout the thesis, I am at work to insert their lives, fraught and unsettling in several ways, into a national historiography of Zimbabwe. For instance, the thesis deploys the insertion of the elderly women's representations of their sexuality (the politics of family planning, child-birth biographies, motherhood/parenthood and labour discourses) inside the familial, political, migratory and educational spaces as a way of providing a fresh narrative about the last century of Zimbabwean history. A valuable contribution of the thesis is that it does show that even the rural context, deemed relatively stable and therefore slow to change, is subject to multiple influences many of which are inflicted by the ruling government. For example, the findings on girlhood discussed in Chapter 5 expose that even though the nation

state has dialectical and negotiated spaces, these are not spaces in which rural women are in a position to negotiate on their terms or to their advantage. The elderly women's stories add another discursive layer to the national story of Zimbabwe, deepening it, to show that it is not only hegemonic discourses of the nation which prevail or ought to be considered. The thesis has birthed a further argument that elderly women's stories offer, like Foucault, an interrogation of national discourse and power, questioning that which comes to be interpreted as social reality.

Limitations of the study

This section draws the reader's attention to what I perceive as major limitations of this research. First and foremost, the fact that I only worked with nineteen elderly women means that it is not easy to make generalisations because the sample size is too small, but the depth and richness of each woman's experiences are irrefutable. Furthermore, the meaning of 'Shonanness' comes up very heavily in this thesis because I only worked with Shona speaking women. If I had worked with people speaking a different language, maybe I could have collected slightly different histories, and other ideas about 'being Zimbabwean' would have emerged. My research topic and 'narrow' focus on elderly Shona women's representations of being 'nationalised' in Zimbabwe explains why there is no case made, in the analytic chapters, of the experiences of these women beyond their specific situation in 'Shonaland' and their Zimbabwean context. Although effort is made to link the findings on Zimbabwe to the literature from East and Southern Africa in the concluding sections of the three analytic chapters, being bolder with these chapters could have allowed for far reaching conclusions to be drawn and articulated. I however acknowledge that many of the themes traced and discussed in this thesis are shared across the region, and such an inference opens space for researchers (myself included) to grasp the impact of this wider generalisation on scholarship.

Methodologically, I have to reiterate the limitations which stem from the complexities of researching sexual discourses, which Tamale (2011), Gune, and Manuel, (2011) and Bennett (2005) have already mentioned. Although the quotation below indicates that some women reclaimed their right to privacy when men invaded the interview space, there were a few occasions when the interviewees did not get the opportunity to share their stories privately.

What do you want? Are you listening to my stories? You have been wandering around trying to listen to what we are discussing here, these are stories that concern women, go away (Interview with Mbuya Mhiri, October 2009).

In one such incident, the presence of a male figure set the boundaries of what I could ask or what the interviewee could say. Whenever I pushed the cultural limits and posed ‘intimate’ questions, I got fragmented and hesitant responses like, “*Just write what you know around that topic...eh...ah...you should just write...you know what I am talking about.*”³⁸ The presence of a man disrupted the flow of the interviewee’s narrative. Conducting interviews under these circumstances limited my options to avoiding ‘too explicit’ questions, which distorted the meaning of the original question, or completely abandoning the question. Sexuality is such a delicate research topic that generates complex questions, and consequently questioning interviewees demands the researcher’s undivided attention, otherwise, the ‘success of the project is jeopardised’ (Gune, and Manuel, 2011:37).

Even though the ‘intrusive’ presence of men during some interview sessions influenced the “discursive limits” (see Jäger, and Maier, 2009:36) of how the elderly women shared their experiences, the bulk of intimate narratives were conveyed without restraint. I have come to the conclusion that such degree of openness somewhat debunks representations of sexuality as a tabooed subject in Zimbabwe. The openness not only “[breaks] the silence in which sexuality has been shrouded, [but it also] gives voice to a dialogue that is essential to advancing understanding of sexuality, and to advancing sexual and reproductive health rights” (Maticka-Tyndale, 2007:220) in many post-colonial nations. The life stories provide insights into the challenge of using representations of women’s re/productive bodies as discursive lenses through which researchers could remap a nation’s shifting terrains. These research complexities could be attributed to the contradictions and tensions which recur in the elderly women’s discourses of sexuality, and the diverse ways they negotiate with the shifts in the socio-political conditions and economic landscape in contemporary Zimbabwe.

The challenge of working across discussed Chapter 4 is worth reiterating here. The fact that I recorded all the life stories in my native language, ChiShona, delayed the write-up of this thesis because I had to translate the transcribed narratives into English before I could analyse

³⁸Interview with Mbuya Shava, November, 2009.

the data. I felt the impact of working across languages because finding English equivalents of the proverbs, idioms and metaphors that the elderly women used to represent aspects of sexuality that they could not openly convey proved to be a huge challenge. I resorted to direct translations, and then added footnotes to clarify complex expressions, an approach that is within the scope of discourse analysis, which incorporates the use of “description and interpretation of meaning-making...in specific situations” (Jaworski, and Coupland, 2006:6). That notwithstanding, similar to the deployment of metaphors among the Baganda of Uganda as “useful conceptual tools for analysing sexuality” (Tamale 2005:12), metaphors and idioms in this thesis function as meaning-making devices that unearth deep-rooted constructions and representations of sexualities.

There were also methodological limitations that stemmed from the intersection of the research topic, the target population, the research setting and my personhood. For instance, the imagination of a young woman questioning her elders about their most private experiences posed feasibility challenges. However, ‘my insider identity’ as a young Shona woman who knew about the role of elderly women (as coaches) in the transition of girls into womanhood bridged the generation gap as I questioned the elderly women about their experiences of gender and sexuality. My Zimbabwean identity also meant that I had contextual knowledge, especially the fact that the elderly women and those in the social context were likely to perceive me in a particular way if I had not altered my dress and behaviour. Being identified with my mother and father, people who served the community as teachers, was also an instrumental method for gaining entrée and trust throughout fieldwork. While I acknowledge the influence of these limitations during the hypothetical stages of this thesis, a detailed discussion in Chapter 4 – under the sub-theme Reflections on my positionality – clearly reveals how most of these challenges worked out to be methodological strengths throughout the research. In all, the presentation of the elderly women’s voices in this thesis does not necessarily mean that an ‘untainted’ account is being produced. My mere presence in the ‘field’ influenced what was revealed by the elderly women as highlighted in Chapter 4 and in Chapter 7.

Theoretical conclusion

The common thread that runs through the thesis is an interest in representations of women’s gender and sexuality over time. What also brings all the chapters together is the dominant

theme of ‘the passage of time’ which has been fundamental to this thesis whose theoretical, contextual and analytic gaze has been on experiences of gender and sexuality, and socio-political change which span colonial and post-colonial time in Zimbabwe. Collectively, the thesis has analysed the diverse ways in which women’s lifelong experiences of gender and sexuality are innately connected to nation-building processes within different chronological moments. The dominant theory is not simply about the way in which looking at gender and sexuality tells us about the quality of experience within a nation. Rather than merely locating women in a context – a nation – the frame of nationhood is particularly important to the theoretical conclusion made here. The theory tells a deeper narrative about the project of nationhood, about what it takes to be a self in that nation such that imagining nationhood through experience is imagining experience as nationalised.

While some scholars might want to focus on what they perceive as ‘more interesting or more important’ ways of analysing the notion of nationhood, this thesis arrives at the theoretical conclusion that it is through representations of women’s bodies that ‘fights for ownership of nationhood’ are engaged. It is through their gendered bodies that women become nationalised and experience the realities of contemporary Zimbabwe, as in any other post-colonial nation. Elderly women – who have survived the violent war of liberation, motherhood battles, the harsh economic landscape and socio-political conditions, and the realities of HIV/AIDS – represent visible and invisible patriarchal structures that continue to shape gender and sexuality discourses in a post-colonial nation, whose social fabric has been severely weakened. I have come to the conclusion that representations of the gendered body subjected to dramatically shifting socio-political and ideological terrains, is indeed a powerful but complicated tool with which to remap and re-see processes of nationhood in Zimbabwe. I hope that the major theoretical finding, together with the theoretical conclusion of this research, will prompt more researchers to engage seriously with elderly women’s bodies and sexualities, and broaden the knowledge base of the understudied subject in Zimbabwe and beyond.

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Appendix 1: Consent Letter for Elderly women

01 October 2009

African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town

Private Bag, 7701, Rondebosh, Cape Town

Telephone number: +27 71 00 44 325

Email: Kezia.Batisai@uct.ac.za

My name is Kezia Batisai and I am a Doctoral Candidate studying at the African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town. I am currently undertaking the research on elderly women whose lives stretch back to 1950. The scope of the research requires me to learn about elderly women's experiences of gender and sexuality at girlhood, motherhood and old age in rural Zimbabwe. The study will take the form of storytelling such that elderly women will share their life stories in an unstructured way at a place and time convenient to them. Although data collection is expected to last for 6 months, each interview session is expected to take between 30 minutes and 1 hour. With your permission the interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed only by the researcher (Kezia) but names will not be disclosed in the final research thesis. I take full responsibility to destroy all the recordings and verbatim transcriptions at the end of the research project.

It is vital to note that participation in the study is purely voluntary. As a participant you have the right to opt out at any time during the study without penalty and any information provided will be destroyed. Attached to this letter is a consent form that you should complete and sign if you agree to be part of this research project.

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance.

Yours faithfully,

Kezia Batisai

Appendix 2: Consent Form for Elderly women

I.....hereby consent to participate in a research conducted by Kezia Batisai as part of her requirements for the fulfilment of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Cape Town.

I have read and understood the consent letter above. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded but my identity shall not be disclosed. The recording will be kept and transcribed by the researcher only. It is also the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the recording is destroyed at the end of the study. My participation in the study is entirely voluntary and I may decide not to participate at any time during the study without any penalty. In addition the information obtained from the study will be used for academic purposes only and shall be published under the shield of anonymity – as far as possible at least.

Interviewee signature

Date

Researcher Signature

Date

Appendix 3: Introduction of the Researcher to the Zaka District officials

Mr Mombeyarara³⁹: Eh...pamusoroi vakuru veZaka Rural District Council, vanasabhuku nemarepresentative vabva kuAgro-Seed, vana mai nanababa. Ndamira pano kuti...ndapiwa mukana uno kuti ndiintroduce (simuka musikana)...ehe wamunoono wakamira apa mwana wamai Mugumo nateacher Mugumo. Hameno kana muchimuziva. Wava...unogara kuSouth Africa kwaanodzidza saka zvidzidzo zvake zvamudzosa muno musha make kuti anzwe kubva kunanaMbuya nhorovondo dzekukura semwanasikana. Saka vanambuya makasununguka kukurukura naye kana tainda pabreak muone kuti mungamubatsira sei. Iye ndiye uchatsanangura zvisere maererano nezvaanoda kunzwa asi ndinovimba zvakanangana nezvemadzimai makurire amakaita nezvamacasangana nazvo kusvika pamuri nhasi.

³⁹ A teacher at a local school